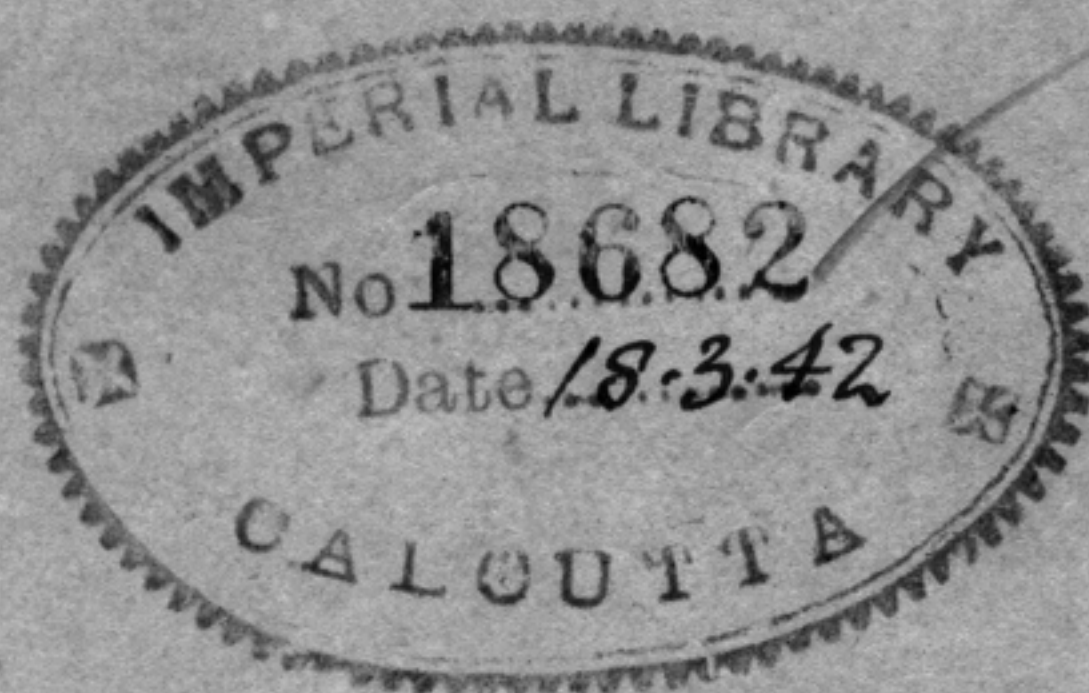


# THE REAL BERNARD SHAW

BY  
MAURICE COLBOURNE

WITH TWENTY  
ILLUSTRATIONS

*pages 49-67 missing*



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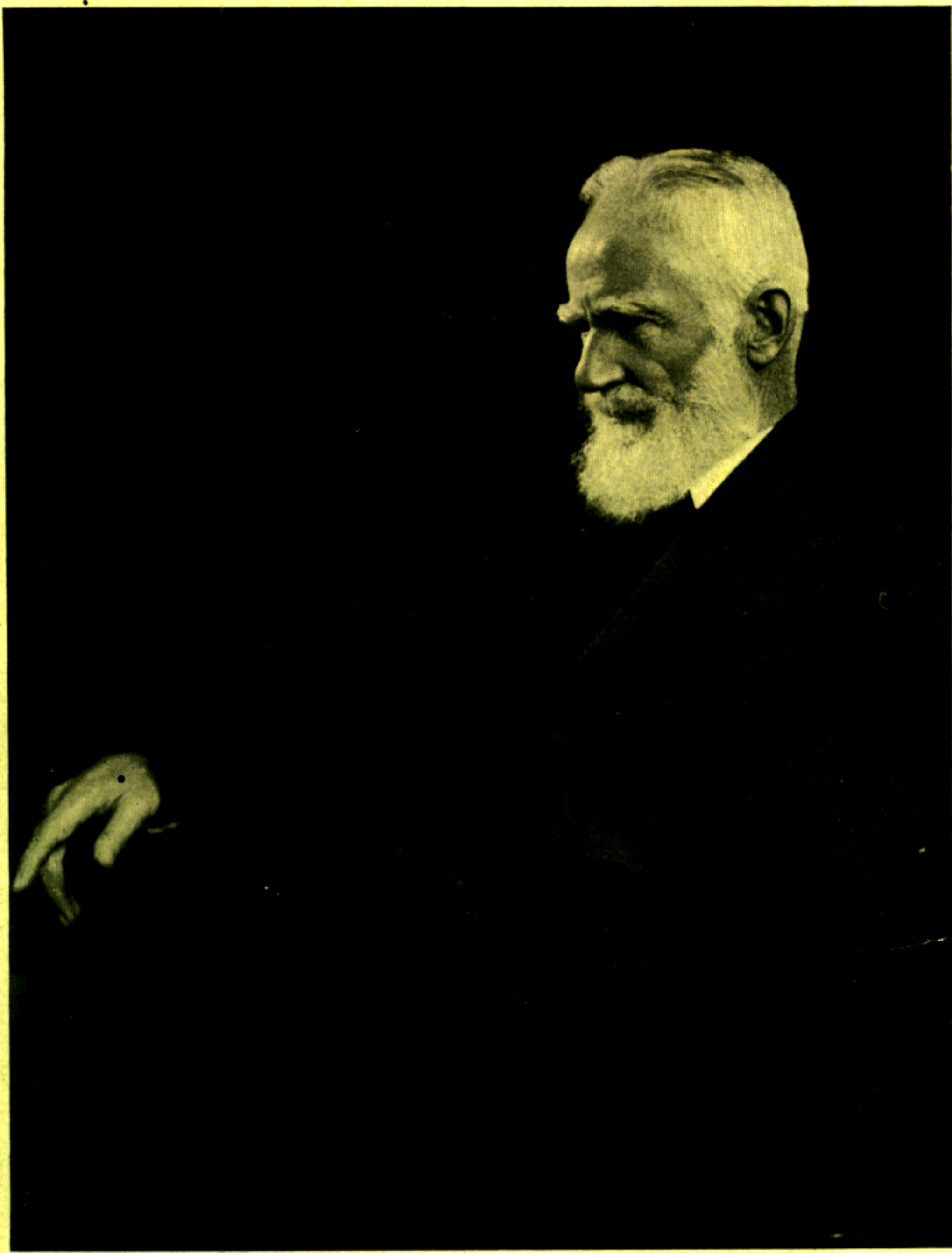


# THE REAL BERNARD SHAW









KEYSTONE

*George Bernard Shaw*

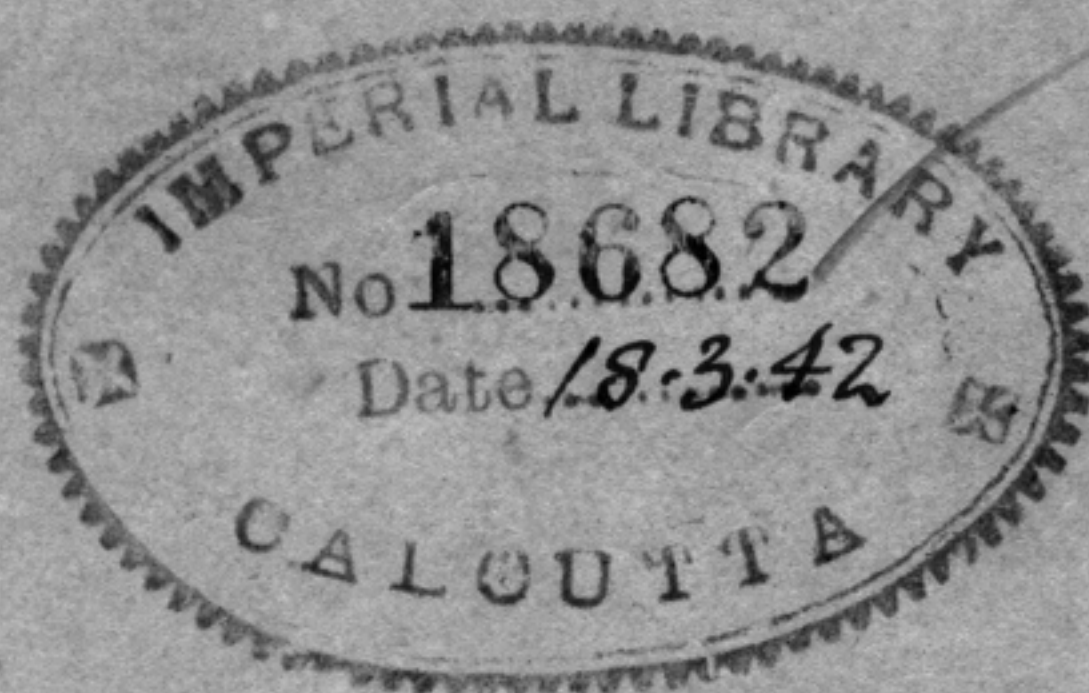


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## CHAPTER I

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, preacher by nature and Archbishop of the Universe by self-appointment, is his own worst enemy. He is for ever defeating his own object; which is, to preach so clearly and publicly that men may know how to live better lives. Yet, preach as he will, the world remains in almost complete ignorance, despite his attendant publicity, not only of his sermons, but of their very themes. Even in regard to the story of his life Bernard Shaw has missed his aim, and to those who ask him why he does not write his autobiography he replies with justifiable irritation that for over half a century he has been doing little else. That is the trouble; he has written too much.

In this taut and strenuous age those two rapidly diminishing quantities, time and money, are important considerations. Shaw is an expensive article. Whether on the stage or in the library, he runs into pounds rather than shillings, and weeks or months rather than hours or days; which the average person simply cannot afford. Bernard Shaw ejects words, as the cuttlefish its inky fluid, whenever he is provoked, that is, all the time; and however stimulating a course it be to battle through the resulting mass of some four million whirling words, particularly if they lead to a clear understanding of his meaning and purpose in the end, both poverty and patience generally forbid. We have neither the time nor the money. What is needed is a Shavian text-book; and as self-confessed Professor (of Scientific Natural History) Bernard



Shaw should have seen to it that his students, who potentially comprise the world's inhabitants, were supplied with one.

Or is Shaw's message incompressible? I do not think so. I hope not, for is it not true that the more important the message the fewer its words? 'Love one another,' for example. A man, it is true, with nothing to say, can say it more easily in four million words than in four thousand. But I think that Shaw, contrary to popular opinion, has something to say. If I were challenged to put his message into two words, I would choose, with an equal stress on both, 'Breed Virtue.' Those two words, moreover, constitute, I think, an almost complete answer to the criticism against Shaw that he talks round everything and solves nothing; for the fault, dear critics, lies not in our Shaw, but in this, that the human race has still to determine whether it wishes to see virtue triumphant, and therefore bred.

Well, if the professor will not write his text-book someone else must. The material is there; it has only to be dug out, boiled down, and put together with understanding—work for any one with the capabilities of, say, a chemist or a chef.

In this book, then, I have refrained from trying to interpret Shaw, preferring to allow, and even to force him, with the aid of some of those four million words, to interpret himself. I have tried even not to criticize him, save when his views have goaded me out of silence. What follows, therefore, is an almost unadulterated Shaw, a Shaw in almost every other line, authentic even in the absence of inverted commas, and one seen through his own eyes rather than mine. The only tips I have to offer are

## IRELAND

straight from the Shavian stable. As to drawing a portrait of the man, if we seek what he really is after and what he really cares about, I believe we shall find a picture of him truer than most. Objectively, of course, it will differ from the perfect sketch of him in the Recording Angel's note-book, and, since the sitter himself will so frequently be using the pencil, it will have a subjective bias. This, however, will be largely righted, I think, by the fact that few people have studied themselves with such objective curiosity as Bernard Shaw has studied Bernard Shaw.

## IRELAND

Surprisingly enough, Bernard Shaw is descended, so one of his fourteen uncles assured him, from that immortalized Macduff, Thane of Fife, who, as Macbeth found to his cost, 'was from his mother's womb, untimely ripp'd.' But that was a long time ago, and there is little discernible in Shaw of his warlike ancestor. The resemblance was rather to the Devil; and later, with advancing years, to Methuselah. But it is a mistake to think of him as old. 'To grow old' is a contradiction in terms: one gets old, or becomes old, only when one no longer grows. And Bernard Shaw is always growing. When a man stops growing, he gives up, sits back, and retires. Bernard Shaw will never retire but into his grave. Until then he will be always on the move, always keeping up with the troops, so to speak, and always feeling obliged to overwhelm the whole army, from generals to batmen,

## THE REAL BERNARD SHAW

with a derisive torrent of affectionate abuse on the plea that every jack man of it is out of step but he.

Bernard Shaw is an Irishman, born in Dublin in the mid-Victorian year of 1856, into a Protestant family with a wide periphery of uncles and aunts. His father was a happy-go-lucky merchant, and his mother was musical from her vocal chords to the tips of her fingers. She was also a capable and practical woman, always busy trying to make both ends meet. They were poor, not because they had no money, but because they had a position to keep up and never enough money to keep it up on. The history of the Shaws is the history of all families of Younger Sons. Bernard's father was second cousin to a baronet, and his mother the daughter of a country gentleman whose rule was, when in difficulties, mortgage. Shabby and genteel, their poverty was that of poor relations with its wretched and unending struggle to keep up appearances at any cost.

With two sisters, but no brothers to keep him company at home, the young George Bernard was packed off to school like any other boy, to keep him out of mischief and out of his mother's way when she was busiest about the house. The school and he had little use for each other; and he paid scant attention to his lessons, though it must not be supposed that he was lazier than most boys. He was Irish; and with the Irish flexibility of mind he was quick to apprehend what would and what would not be useful to him in later life. Within him lay a capacity for educating himself in his own good time and in a way that had no connection with







*Dublin, where  
Bernard Shaw  
was born and  
bred*



TOPICAL PRESS

*This is the house I was born in. G.B.S.*



*This corner house is where we lived during my boyhood. G.B.S.*



school routines or curriculums. When it was suggested to him in later life that he had 'gained far more from listening to his mother and her friends singing Mozart than from all his reading put together,' his answer was an affirmative 'Hooray!'

This connection between Bernard Shaw and music cannot be stressed too much or too often. In three ways at least has music influenced his life in a concrete sense, apart from the abstract and continuous influence it exerts upon every musically gifted person. For it was to the cash brought in by his mother's singing lessons that Shaw owed his bread and butter when, unemployed, he lived on her in London for a number of years. Again, it was as a musical critic that he got his foot set firmly on the first rung of the ladder. And finally, glorious and abiding, there remains the musical quality that saturates and sustains all his work and informs it with its peculiar melody and rhythm; without which, while it is conceivable that the moralist and preacher in Shaw would have impelled him to write at the length he has, it is hardly conceivable that he would have become what he is to-day, the world's permanent best-seller.

The entire family was musical. His mother played the piano and sang, his father played the trombone, his eldest uncle the now obsolete ophicleide, this aunt the violoncello, that aunt the harp and tambourine, and his elder sister had a beautiful singing voice. In these days of entertainment from the ether such a concentration of talent seems proper only to a concert party. But in those days entertainment had to be found locally, and instead of asking, 'How about some bridge?' or 'Shall we



watch the news?' a hostess would inquire whether her guests had brought their pieces.

Bernard Shaw himself, however, mastered no orthodox musical instrument. He was content to make music with the English language.

Alas! the time was soon to come when no more guests would arrive at the Shaws' hospitable house. Respectable society had discovered a skeleton there. Not that it was difficult to discover, for, in the person of Shaw's father, it refused to be confined to its cupboard. The head of the family, in theory a teetotaler, drank. When the habit worsted him he was racked with shame and humiliation, but he remained incurable. He had, however, a strong sense of the ludicrous, and was so completely possessed by the comic spirit that what in most men's lives would have been material for tragedy, in his became merely uproarious anticlimaxes. Thus when he was told that his business had collapsed, and ruin stared him in the face, he found the catastrophe so irresistibly amusing that he had to retreat hastily from the office to an empty corner of the warehouse, and laugh until he was exhausted. This irrepressible comic sense prevented his bouts of drinking from becoming sordid; and his family felt instinctively that by laughing at the humiliations he brought on them they would render them at least endurable. Of this gift for comedy Bernard Shaw inherited a full share. With ribald common sense and the ability to assess an amiable weakness at its true value, he remarks that if one cannot get rid of a family skeleton one may as well make it dance, and describes a scene as follows, showing how infectious the comic spirit can be when let loose in an

## IRELAND

Irish family that is determined to keep life tolerable. 'A boy who has seen "the governor," with an imperfectly wrapped-up goose under one arm and a ham in the same condition in the other (both purchased under heaven knows what delusion of festivity), butting at the garden wall in the belief that he was pushing open the gate, and transforming his top hat to a concertina in the process, and who, instead of being overwhelmed with shame and anxiety at the spectacle, has been so disabled by merriment (uproariously shared by a maternal uncle) that he has hardly been able to rush to the rescue of the hat and pilot its wearer to safety, is clearly not a boy who will make tragedies of trifles instead of making trifles of tragedies.'

To the outside world, however, Mr Shaw's alcoholic antics were beyond a joke, and Polite Society quietly but firmly dropped the Shaws beyond the Pale. The result was that their naturally shy son became still shyer, and grew up in abysmal ignorance of ordinary social routine. Now when a sensitive boy becomes conscious of his social deficiencies the first thing he does, if he has any spirit, is to hide them if he cannot make them good. To do this he will devise a protective armour with infinite cunning, much as a crustacean will fit itself with a shell, and in it will be found qualities exactly the opposite of those in which he is deficient. Being a very sensitive boy, and possessing a great deal of spirit, the young Bernard manufactured his own anti-shy armament so effectively, barbing himself with arrogance and steeling himself to self-assertion, that his elders may well have found him intolerably impudent. Let us hold fast to this

shyness of Bernard Shaw's. When we meet it again, as we shall, let us recognize it for what it is, an integral part of the man. If we dismiss his shyness as affected, we shall be dismissing some of the real Bernard Shaw, and so be missing our man. ✓ If he still puts on a bold front, and still squares up to the world with aggressive self-assertion, it is because he is still basically shy. No doubt he has worn his armour for so long and taken such care to make it fit closely that it has gradually worked, so to speak, under his skin. Now it is second nature to him, and he could not remove it if he would. But the shyness is there just the same, more than skin deep.

At the age of fourteen, or thereabouts, one of the lad's uncles found him a post in Dublin with a leading firm of land agents; and from them, as junior clerk or glorified office boy, Bernard Shaw drew his first money, at the then not outrageous rate of eighteen shillings a month. To his own inner dismay he made good. His heart was not in clerking, but it had to be done, so he did it, if not with all his might, as efficiently as his self-esteem demanded. When the principals were out it was he who induced the gentlemen apprentices to sing operatic selections; but when the cashiership fell vacant it was he who filled it, even changing his sloping straggly handwriting to the clear, neat, upright one we know to-day, as being more suitable for entries in the cash book. His salary rose slowly and steadily, until by the time he was nineteen it exceeded £80 a year. But business success was not what he craved for. Yet it seemed to be coming to him relentlessly, advancing on him threateningly,



## IRELAND

engulfingly. Something had to be done by way of escape, and done quickly. He gave a month's notice. And so, in March 1876, he broke loose. By April he was in England, in his twentieth year, and he did not set foot in Ireland again until 1905, when he paid it a visit to please his wife. On arriving at Euston Station he was afraid to take a hansom cab lest he should make a fool of himself by not knowing how to get into it. So he took a four-wheeled 'growler,' and drove across London to his mother's house in Kensington.

Before entering that house there are two things belonging to Shaw's Irish period which it might be well to mention here. I choose these two, out of the overflowing stream of thoughts and fancies, out of the myriad sum of incidents and influences which pour in upon and happen to every growing boy, because they seem to fit unforcedly into the pattern of the real Bernard Shaw.

The first is Shaw's visit to Mountjoy Prison as a boy. The visit was not paid with any sociological or morbid intent: an acquaintance took him, much as though he were taking him to the Zoo. None the less the prison and its inmates made a deep impression on the boy, and fifty years later, writing of the old lags he saw that day, Shaw records that the impression which 'stuck longest and hardest, was that it was impossible to reform such men, it was useless to torture them, and dangerous to release them.' The seeds of Bernard Shaw's ideas concerning crime and punishment and cruelty were sown that day. Indeed, one can almost see them starting furiously to germinate as he returned through the prison gates into the outer air.

The other matter concerns Shaw's attitude towards animals. Does he detest, tolerate, or like them? Most people, I fear, would guess that he liked them only in theory and on paper. A guess so uncharitable would be due largely to the difficulty of picturing Bernard Shaw in contact with animals, so closely is he associated in the public mind with the platform and with that impregnable fortress of the shy, the study desk. As with most guesses about Bernard Shaw, this one is wrong. For not only does he like animals, but they like him. He was brought up with animals about the house, and a dog and a parrot provided him with the kind of education which he could understand and value. 'It amuses me,' he tells us, 'to talk to animals in a sort of jargon I have invented for them; and it seems to me that it amuses them to be talked to, and that they respond to the tone of the conversation, though its full intellectual content may to some extent escape them. Further, it gives me extraordinary gratification to find a wild bird treating me with confidence, as robins sometimes do.'

Acutely aware of his kinship with animals, Bernard Shaw feels that he possesses this sense in a greater degree than most people, because while he agrees that it may be necessary for a variety of reasons to kill, say, a rhinoceros, he would never agree that killing it for fun was one of them. When he was told as a child that the dog and the parrot were not creatures like himself, and that an impassable gulf was fixed between the animal creation and the human, he flatly refused to believe it. His

## IRELAND

immortality at the expense of its dumb brothers who could not even answer back, convinced the boy of nothing except the desirability of escaping as soon as possible from the grasp of all nurses and religions that not only told such whacking lies, but quite honestly believed them. Thus, apart from his Protestant upbringing, and apart from many other considerations, the Roman Catholic Church could never have claimed Bernard Shaw; for it declines to support the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals officially, on the ground that animals have no souls. Later, when the concept of Creative Evolution flashed before him and filled the niche which he had ruthlessly emptied and reserved for the Unknown God, his sense of kinship with the animal world only confirmed him in his vision, and crowned it. For, as he said years afterwards: 'This sense of kinship of all forms of life is all that is needed to make Evolution not only a conceivable theory, but an inspiring one. St Anthony was ripe for the Evolution theory when he preached to the fishes, and St Francis when he called the birds his little brothers.'

It may be not unfitting, then, to leave Ireland, that moist green land of purple heather and brown bogs, of sad evenings, whisky, dreaming, and disillusion, with the thought, prompted perhaps by a leprechaun at dusk, of the infant Shaw imbibing the first intimations of religion from the wisdom of a parrot and the friendliness of a dog.

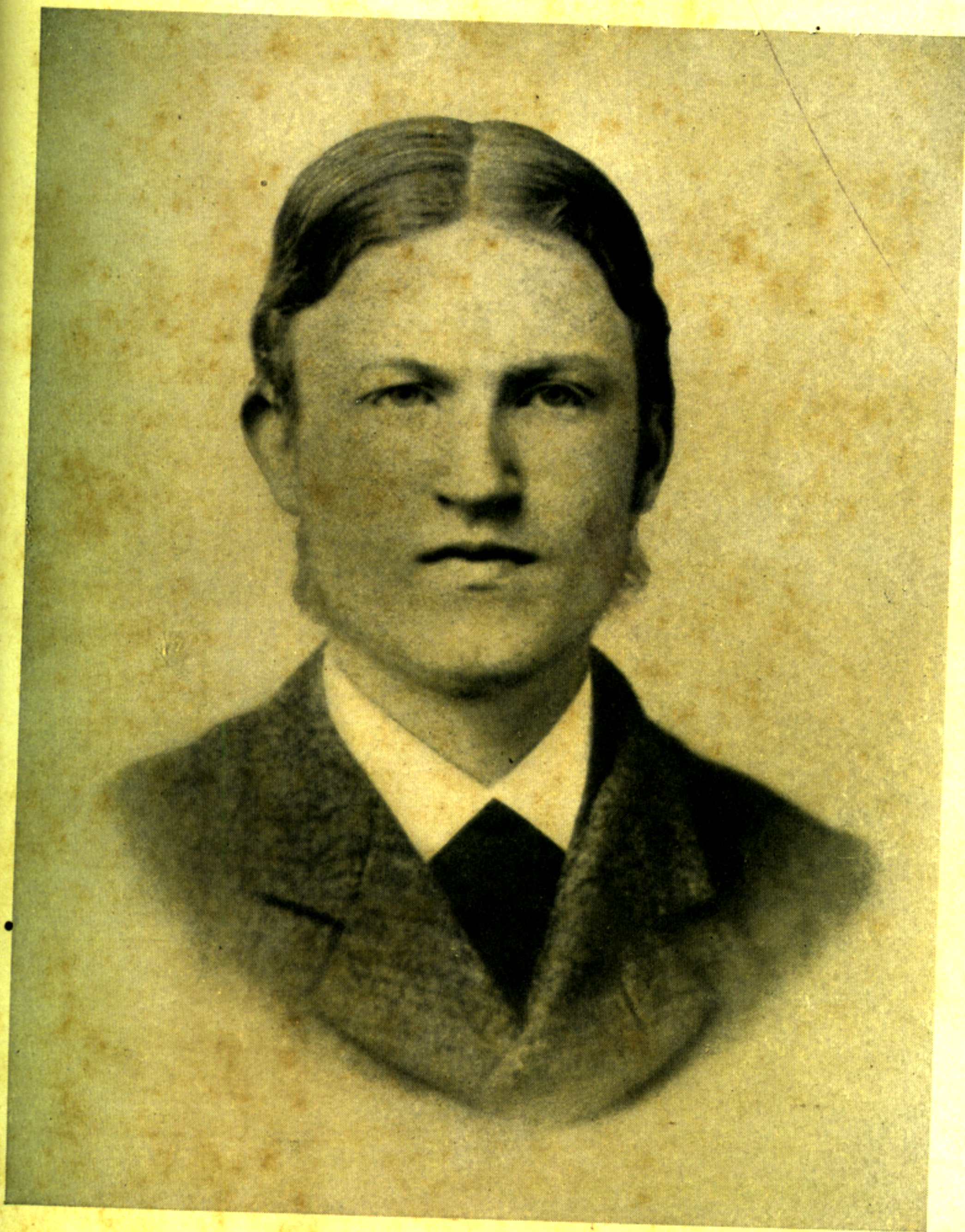
## CHAPTER II

### ENGLAND

BERNARD SHAW felt that Ireland was a good place to get out of. In London, however, his progress was not exactly triumphal: it was slower than a snail's. This was not surprising. What equipment, what weapons had he brought with him as he drove to his mother's in his four-wheeler on that spring day in 1876 and looked out with eager curiosity on London for the first time? Hardly those of a conquering hero.

Inwardly he was shy, outwardly he was aggressive, and socially he was all thumbs. Poor, he had neither influence nor prospects. The only profession for which he was qualified, a business one, was precisely the one from which he had just turned and fled. His heart and bent lay in the arts, and he wanted to be a painter. As an enthusiastic dilettante and amateur he knew his way about the world of books and music and pictures, but there was no money in that world. Besides, a lad whose chief qualification was that he had saturated himself in the Bible and Shakespeare before he was ten years old because he liked them would, if he were wise enough to know which side his bread was buttered, carefully withhold such damaging information from any prospective commercial employer by whom he might have the luck to be interviewed. Moreover, he was not even free: he had to fulfil the obligations of his station, which was that of gentleman, and keep his collar and cuffs clean and his person tidy.





*The beard begins : Bernard Shaw in his early twenties*





## ENGLAND

At this time Mrs Shaw augmented her slender income by giving singing lessons, and when she opened the front door to welcome Bernard, which she did with all a mother's love, her practical self can have seen little in the cheerful stripling except another mouth to be fed. Yet the son she embraced had brought imponderable treasures with him: a freedom from illusion; the power to face facts; sharpened wits; the sensitive pride of the imaginative man who is determined to fight his way out of the shame of poverty and the servitude of drudgery; and also, his mother's food and shelter notwithstanding, self-reliance, for Bernard Shaw knew instinctively that none but Bernard Shaw could further the interests of this young, poor, timid fellow, since none but he knew what those interests were.

I include in Shaw's luggage the power to face facts. This power derives from the fact that, as Shaw himself once remarked to G. K. Chesterton, an Irishman has two eyes. For the power to face facts obviously depends on the ability to see facts, and by making this remark Shaw indicated one of the salient differences between the Irish and the English. I mean the difference in the ways of regarding the Romantic and the Real, or the Ideal and the Actual, or the sentiment and the fact giving rise to it. To the Englishman's eyes the Romantic and the Real are superimposed and concentric, and therefore identical: he views them as one and the same thing. But the Irishman keeps them separate. Your Irishman can perceive and appreciate the glamour of romance with as much feeling as your

eyes, as it were; the other is busy staring at the hard kernel of prosaic facts around which the romance gathers and circles in a sort of aura. The Irishman never takes his eye off the naked facts, while the Englishman likes to see them only through the aura. It is the Englishman's skill in the art of romantic idealization, for instance, that so happily transmutes the leaden necessities of commercial expansion into the silver opportunities for punitive expeditions, and finally into the golden glories of empire and government for the good of the natives; just as it unfortunately causes those with less skill in the art to call the English hypocrites. An Irishman, on the other hand, is a realist ~~first~~ and all the time. The Duke of Wellington and Bernard Shaw were being typically Irish, for example, when the one declared that his victorious troops were the scum of the earth, and the other filled his soldier's pouch with chocolate in place of ammunition. To the Irish even politics are real, and the English House of Commons has been denuded of realists since the Irish left it. There is no wile they will not practise, no charm or blarney they will not exert, to gain the ultimate object on which one eye is always relentlessly fixed. But the Englishman hears only the blarney, and, immediately flattered, he proceeds to romanticize the flatterer into the distressful, broguey hero of a hard-luck story that holds water only on the stage. Meanwhile the two-eyed Irishman plays the part expected of him for as long as it suits his purpose, and writes down the Englishman as a credulous fool.

If we bear in mind, then, that Bernard Shaw is always the Irishman and is English only by domicile,



we shall understand better the nature of the two-eyed monster who, in 1876, came to this hospitable land like a crusader to preach to its long-suffering inhabitants.

For nearly three years Bernard Shaw remained outwardly quiescent, doing nothing notable, and for all we know doing it very well. Observant, inquisitive, curious, quick to reject and select, he probably got as much out of his enforced tours of London and its environs as richer young men of his age got from their grander tours down the Rhine or through the capitals of Europe, or from the yearly twenty-eight weeks of leisure that form part of a university education.

Bernard Shaw was twenty-three. If the world would not come to him, he must go to it, and in 1879 he obtained a post with the Edison Telephone Company, or rather a cousin obtained it for him. At first his work took him into the East End of London. His job there was to knock on doors and persuade the people who opened them to allow their roofs to be invaded and fixed up as supports for telephone apparatus. The bold airs needed to do this sort of thing successfully had in Shaw's case to be simulated, of course; and although the rude impact between sensitive shyness and people whose experience had made them suspicious of all well-spoken callers helped to stiffen his backbone and thicken his skin, the whole idea of bearding strangers remained ridiculously and horribly painful to him. He was soon rescued from the streets, however, and transferred to the haven of the company's office in Queen Victoria Street. There his previous training, his painstaking neatness, thoroughness, and sense

## THE REAL BERNARD SHAW

of method came into play, and the only strangers he had to meet were visitors come to marvel at the miracle of the telephone, and to these Bernard Shaw enjoyed playing the showman. Before the end of 1879, however, the Edison Telephone Company was swallowed up by the Bell Telephone Company, and Shaw, taking care that it did not swallow him too, seized the occasion to escape from the mighty maw of business for ever.

And so, remarks Shaw, 'you must not suppose because I am a man of letters, that I never tried to earn an honest living. I began trying to commit that sin against my nature when I was fifteen, and persevered, from youthful timidity and diffidence, until I was twenty-three.'

He left the City not only without a stain on his character, but with a clear conscience and also a literary hope. For while helping to conduct the telephone business with one hand he had written his first novel with the other. It was called *Immaturity*. Unfortunately, no one would publish it. So he wrote another: with the same result. Then another, and another, and yet another; five novels in all, and not a penny earned; six years of dogged trying and unbroken failure. Familiar to him chiefly as five heavy brown-paper parcels, these offspring of Shaw's nonage must have taught him what a mother feels like when she is saddled with five unmarriageable daughters; for their upkeep and travelling expenses alone (sixpence every time one of them was packed off hopefully to the next prospective publisher) caused their parent considerable financial anxiety. Eventually the mice, more enterprising than the publishers, began to nibble at the

## ENGLAND

fifty times rejected manuscripts; but they were unable to finish them.

It was not so much that the novels were unpromising, which certainly they were not, or jejune, which undeniably they were, as that they were just not wanted. True, they had plot, plenty of action, and style. Indeed, their style was so impeccable that it stood out and stared at you self-consciously, and a little self-righteously, as though to say: 'I may be stilted, but I know that I am correct.' The characters showed a complete mastery over the rules of syntax and grammar, Latin as well as English, while those who were born in the purple, as the saying went, displayed a knowledge altogether below their station. But it was not on account of these faults that the books were left to the mice. The real stumbling-block lay elsewhere. Both matter and manner, though not perfect, were at least remediable; but the author's attitude towards the things he wrote about apparently was not. The aim of sensible commercial publishers being in the main to give the public what it wants, it was clear that the last thing the English public wanted was contempt or ridicule poured on its most cherished ideals and most romantic institutions. And these were precisely the things which Shaw, as a two-eyed foreigner and natural satirist, could not help doing once his pen touched paper. In short, to the publishing world, which was the only world that knew his name, Bernard Shaw was a Bad Bet. And so, more to atone for their virtues than their faults, the members of the bulky brown-paper quintet were condemned to wander perpetually, like lost souls in hell.

Their author could not afford to confess himself defeated. What would such a confession involve? A return to the City and an 'honest living.' Never! Deep down he believed in himself, and for the sake of self-respect and self-discipline, and to keep his hand in, he must stick to it, and go on writing, writing, writing. And hoping. Buying demy-sized paper, sixpennyworth at a time, he folded it into quarto, and forced himself to fill five pages a day, no more and no less, even if it meant finishing a day's work in the middle of a sentence. The precision and regularity of this self-imposed task did more than keep his literary gifts in trim; it taught him to write to order—a very different thing from teaching himself to write. In this way there issued from him, with clockwork regularity, *Immaturity* in 1879; *The Irrational Knot* in 1880; *Love Among the Artists* in 1881; *Cashel Byron's Profession* in 1882; and, in 1883, *An Unsocial Socialist*. Before he had finished the last, however, he discovered that, for the time being, he had no more to say. Accordingly, he stopped writing until he should have learnt more about this world's people and problems at first hand.

Looking back on those five years, which somehow seem like an unconscious Five-Year Plan, what strikes one most, I think, is the dogged undaunted persistence, the painstaking thoroughness that threads through them like a skewer of steel. This thoroughness is part and parcel of Bernard Shaw. Only two men in English history, Laud and Strafford, have earned the nickname *Thorough*; Bernard Shaw, if he wished, could lay an equal claim to it. And, like the archbishop and the earl,



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Shaw, too, I think, loses something by his thoroughness. We must blame the schoolmaster in him. The didactic and magisterial side of him finds it difficult to leave well alone, and insists on dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't,' as though he misdoubted his pupils' ability to read. Every one with experience of Bernard Shaw's plays knows that, as with Shakespeare, audiences listen better to fewer words rather than to many. Shavian passages pruned of their recurrent redundancies, but pruned so that their melody is not impaired, keep audiences awake: uncut, they are apt to send them to sleep, mentally, if not physically. It is a simple fact that an audience, having digested one point, is not only ready but impatient for the next one, as seals at feeding time are impatient for the next fish to be thrown. The technique of all the arts is the process of selection and elimination. Mere luxuriance is not art: the jungle is luxuriant. Neither is mere prodigality art: nature is prodigal. The greater the artist the fewer the things he needs for his effects. It is so in every sphere; whether in art, war, industry, science, or sport, the greatness of results is to be judged by the economy of the means employed. To run over a beetle with a steam roller is a small achievement: but David's conquest of the Philistines with nothing but a stone and a sling was a great one. Economy of effort is the hall-mark of all really great achievement, as the writer of Genesis perceived. Judged by this criterion, Bernard Shaw falls short in the sphere of art: to which he would quickly retort that, in his works, art is a by-product and that what matters is what he says, not how he says it.

Let us return to his novels. They were like butterflies in the chrysalis stage, not dead but dormant. They needed only the warm sun of their author's subsequent fame to enable them to emerge from their brown-paper cocoons, one by one, and wing their various ways into publication.

Meanwhile poverty, always poverty. Genteel poverty, gnawing, humiliating, cramping. Poverty, Shabbiness, and Shyness, his three disgraces, would link arms and stand before him in the still watches of pessimism, and stare at him and challenge him to throw them off. Even his clothes, scrupulously cared for, were in a shocking state. In addition to broken boots, and cuffs whose raggedness had to be trimmed with scissors, he calls to mind a 'tall hat so limp with age that I had to wear it back-to-front to enable me to take it off without doubling up the brim.' Probably the best uniform for disguising shabbiness is evening dress, and Shaw thankfully availed himself of it. He has given us two pictures of himself, thus attired, prowling about London by night with empty pockets but feeling almost presentable and socially at ease. In one he is walking along Sloane Street when a down-and-out approaches him and says he has no money. 'Neither have I,' answers Shaw. In the other a prostitute accosts him at the corner of Bond Street and Piccadilly, and Shaw makes the mistake of not realizing that if he answers her politely she will be reluctant to leave him, with the result that they are half-way up Bond Street, pursuer and pursued, before he can persuade her that she has mistaken her man, which he finally does by taking out his purse, turning it upside down, and shaking it.



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Had you seen a young man at supper time on a Sunday evening walking back and forth along the Chelsea Embankment, his incipient beard framing a miserable yet fiercely determined expression, you might have thought it was someone steeling himself for suicide in the Thames; but it would have been only shy Bernard Shaw steeling himself to ring the bell of a house nearby where he was bidden to supper.

What interests could he pursue, what places could he visit cost free? Well, there was politics, not parliamentary politics, but advanced politics. Indeed, the more advanced the better. In plunged Bernard Shaw, the complete Bolshie of the day when Socialism was the last word. It cost nothing. Indeed, he once cleared a few pounds by counting the returns at an election. Then, also admission free, there were the famous American Evangelists, Moody and Sankey, to hear; and as an antidote, the famous free-thinker, Bradlaugh. And there was Bradlaugh's friend, Annie Besant, with her hand ever stretched out to help the impecunious and striving. With world thought in a ferment and such books as Darwin's *Origin of Species* as the yeast, there were many interesting things to discuss, and plenty of debating clubs to discuss them. Any alert, curious, iconoclastic, revolutionary mind, like Shaw's, can turn a metropolis into an Aeropagus where, as of old, strangers spend their time 'in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.' As such Shaw treated London, having failed to prise it open as his oyster. For his *début* as a debater, which took place late in 1879, after he had finished *Immaturity*, he chose a little club



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called the Zetetical Society, where he made what we can be sure was a thoroughly thought-out speech in what he confesses was a 'condition of heartbreaking nervousness.' Then there was the National Gallery, to be enjoyed free of charge on certain days of the week; and, further afield, the gardens and pictures of Hampton Court.

Above all, there was the British Museum. For years Bernard Shaw went there almost daily. If the world was his school, the British Museum was the study where he did most of his homework. There he charged himself with facts, like a human accumulator, storing them away in his verbal batteries for long years of use. The foundation of Shaw's success in debate was laid in the British Museum; for his smiling cocksureness in argument is no bluff, but a cloak for a vast array of relevant facts. If he is courteous in debate it is because he can afford to be; and if he always has the last word it is because he always has a few more facts up his sleeve than his opponent. It was in the Museum's famous Reading Room that William Archer first saw him, not knowing at the time who he was. Archer was then dramatic critic on a prominent weekly paper called *The World*—that same William Archer who later achieved fame as the translator of Ibsen, and also, shortly before his death after the War, scored a popular success with a melodrama called the *Green Goddess*, the material for which, incidentally, was revealed to him in a dream. Writing of 1885, Archer recalls Bernard Shaw in the Museum as 'a young man of tawny complexion and attire,' assiduous in his attendance and sitting with the same two books in front of him day after

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day, for weeks at a time. The two books were Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (in French), and an orchestral score of *Tristan and Isolde*, both of which the young man studied, according to Archer, 'alternately, if not simultaneously.' Reading at the British Museum, however, though an excellent investment, pays no dividends at the time, and the fact that during his first nine years in London Bernard Shaw earned by his pen the sum of fifteen shillings, should make budding authors pause; or, perhaps, do anything but pause.

The long lane of these nine years found a turning in 1885. In that year Bernard Shaw, approaching thirty, for the first time earned enough money to keep himself, his income for that year being £112.

No doubt it is tempting to exaggerate the tribulations of the past when describing them from the comfortable fireside of the present. But in youth small things really are big, simply because they seem so. They take on the enormous proportions of a nightmare which is not less real for being fantastic. Yet no one in the twenties is as young as all that; Bernard Shaw was no child. Indeed, if any candid critic were to say straight out, that instead of throwing up a good steady job, frittering away his time in writing novels and articles which no one would publish, and then complaining of his self-wrought poverty, Shaw, by every normal standard of decent feeling and behaviour, ought to have been thoroughly ashamed of himself for taking advantage of his mother by sponging on her, we shall find Shaw himself the first to agree. And he agrees, not reluctantly or shamefacedly, but aggressively and even proudly. Discovering that an

American writer was romanticizing him into a peasant boy who was the staff and comfort of his mother's declining years, Shaw obliterates the rosy picture with a vigorous counterblast from which the following fragments are extracted. 'I was an able-bodied and ableminded young man in the strength of my youth; and my family, then heavily embarrassed, needed my help urgently.' 'I did not throw myself into the struggle for life: I threw my mother into it.' 'People wondered at my heartlessness: one young and romantic lady had the courage to remonstrate openly and indignantly with me "for the which," as Pepys said of the shipwright's wife who refused his advances, "I did respect her." Callous as Comus to moral babble, I steadily wrote my five pages a day and made a man of myself (at my mother's expense) instead of a slave. And I protest that I will not suffer James Huneker or any romanticist to pass me off as a peasant boy qualifying for a chapter in Smiles's Self Help, or a good son supporting a helpless mother, instead of a stupendously selfish artist leaning with the full weight of his hungry body on an energetic and capable woman.' 'My mother,' he concludes, 'worked for my living instead of preaching that it was my duty to work for hers: therefore take your hat off to her and blush.' That is the way Bernard Shaw is liable to attack any one who tries to defend him on conventional or romantical grounds. He is quite capable of defending himself on heretical grounds.

The above extracts are excellent examples of the tactics of a man who knows that the best method of defence is attack. An expert in carrying a war into the enemy's camp and nailing his own pennon to a



hostile lance, Shaw has practised the same tactics all his life. A striking illustration was in his fight with the censor of plays. That official, Shaw doughtily declared, was not only negatively guilty of refusing a licence for the Shavian religious tract called *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet*, but positively guilty of granting licences for plays which were not only not religious, but habitually immoral in the subtlest, and therefore the most harmful, pornographic sense.

Before passing from his lean years, or rather his leanest, for Bernard Shaw's monetary success was only gradual, let us mark the supreme lesson which lack of money taught him. He realized then, and has never forgotten since, that without money a man cannot live, he can only exist. A man's first duty to himself and to society is to secure for himself an independent income, the fatter the better, as an essential condition of living as he should: that is, fully, adventurously, and splendidly.

## CHAPTER III

### CRITIC

ACUTE critical faculty is not easily smothered, particularly when its owner has kept it sharpened for nine long, unrewarded years. In what guise the talent first appears matters little, for it will soon find its proper role. That it happened to be William Archer who got Bernard Shaw his first job in the art world, and that the job consisted in reviewing books for *The Pall Mall Gazette* and pictures for *The World*, is therefore of small importance. What is important, is that Shaw, for the first time in his life, was now in paid and congenial work of a regular kind. Archer, too busy translating Ibsen to review books, and considering himself insufficiently qualified to criticize pictures, had offered to load both tasks on to Shaw's unemployed and restless shoulders. The offer was accepted eagerly and confidently; for, thanks to the Dublin National Gallery, Shaw felt as much at home among pictures as among books.

In this way, under the editorship of Edmund Yates, who had made *The World* the most fashionable weekly paper in London, Shaw spent the next three years. Then, in 1888, 'Tay Pay' O'Connor suggested to his compatriot that he should leave *The World* to write political articles for *The Star*, of which O'Connor was both editor and founder. Feeling eminently qualified for this job too, Shaw accepted it readily. The invitation, in itself, indicates how his reputation was steadily increasing as a political revolutionary. Having swallowed Karl

Marx hook, line, and sinker in the British Museum (fourteen years before Lenin), Shaw would bring him up on the least provocation wherever he was permitted to do so: in London, on platforms at debating clubs or in Hyde Park; and in the provinces, in any place to which he was invited and a third class return fare provided. He would accept no lecturer's fee; for, as he pointed out, a fee could carry restrictive conditions with it, and he preferred freedom of speech. In short, since his first nerve-racking experience at the Zetetical Society he had progressed from Z to A as a political speaker of (theoretically) the most subversive type, and the red of his beard, now an accomplished achievement, did service for a tie of that colour.

The Star refused to print his articles. Very naturally, for the fellow not only seemed to know his subject, but succeeded in making it shockingly clear. The articles were too much of a good thing, and they were returned by a scandalized editor as being a hundred years in advance of their time. O'Connor nevertheless was loth to let go of his man, and to retain his services switched him over to The Star's musical department. And there, as musical critic with two columns a week at his disposal at the rate of a guinea a column, Bernard Shaw found his feet at last. One could say that he found them on the first rung of the proverbial ladder, were not all mention of ladders to be avoided in connection with Bernard Shaw, who strenuously denies that he ever climbed any ladder, and maintains that he 'achieved eminence by sheer gravitation'; a description that somehow always reminds me of a successful levitation at a séance.



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He set about his columns, and his readers, with a will, putting his whole being, musical, critical, and journalistic, into the job. Like a new school-master eager to try modern methods in an old school, his lessons were to be Without Tears. Choosing the name Corno di Bassetto (without realizing the complete inappropriateness of hiding himself under the name of an almost extinct musical instrument that made the most funereal noises), he let fly with the invigorating sweep of a new broom. Musical criticism then being written for the most part in ponderous terms as dead as a dead language and to the layman almost as foreign, Corno determined above all else to make it readable, even to deaf people. Why write it else? To this end the teacher in him, and the preacher, and the propagandist, and the actor, and the orator, and half a dozen more of his personalities, all lent a hand. The result was a strikingly complete success. Corno's style, easy, simple, pugnacious, yet persuasive, witty and, above all, clear, was greatly influenced, and indeed directly derived from the experience of Bernard Shaw as a public speaker. The latter knew that a bored audience is a lost audience; that before an audience can be instructed it must be wooed and entertained; that it is not enough to make points quickly, clearly, accurately, and without ado, but that each point, if it is to be driven home to stay, must somehow be heightened and sharpened, now with wit, now with sarcasm, now with anecdote, now with exaggeration, now with under-emphasis. To make people want to read what you write you must first persuade them to listen to what you say. Already expert in cart

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and trumpet oratory, Shaw continued to practise its lively tricks in print as Corno di Bassetto, with the result that his musical criticisms (and for that matter nearly all his writings) read like topical speeches. Opening Bassetto's volume at random, I find this passage: 'As might have been suspected, a settled weariness of life, an utter perfunctoriness, an unfathomable inanity pervaded the very souls of "No. I." The tenor, originally, I have no doubt, a fine young man, but now cherubically adipose, was evidently counting the days until death should release him from the part of Wilder.' This, as one not without experience of public speaking, I recognize at once as first-class oratorical material. Not only is it eminently speakable, but it has all the humorous urbanity of a successful after-dinner speech. Even apart from its context, of which I am ignorant, the passage holds the attention in an entertaining way, and so predisposes the reader to be instructed.

Through buying the orchestral score of Lohengrin some years previously, Shaw had made the 'gigantic discovery of Wagner, then commonly considered a monster of cacophony, when he was considered at all, and Bassetto's columns were largely devoted to revealing the nature of his discovery to people whose first inclination was to stop their ears. No critic could make the public like Wagner; time alone could do that. But this persuasively pugnacious critic at least made people aware of the great German's existence and aims. After touring round England's opera houses and concert halls, including the Old Crystal Palace, Corno's cry was the same as King George the Fifth's after that sailor

had toured round his empire: Wake Up, England! What did it matter that Wagner was noisy? He was New. And therein lay one of his chief attractions for Bernard Shaw, whose attitude to any novelty is normally one of immediate welcome and enthusiastic inquiry. Be careful, he seems to say, there may be something in it; one never knows; so give it a chance. In Shaw, novelty found an ever-ready champion, and as such Shaw fought for Wagner's acceptance. Now that Wagner is safely installed in the musicians' House of Lords, as it were, his value as a novelty and a jolting force is lessened, and when the radio plays Lohengrin now, Corno di Bassetto that was switches it off. But in the eighties and nineties, in regard to music, his head was full of little else.

Bernard Shaw never tires of telling us that we get from his plays only what we bring to them; a truism, of course, which applies not only to his but to all plays. I remember when I saw Rutland Boughton's musical drama, *The Immortal Hour*, that I had to bring to it a plot of my own to suit what I saw, because I had no programme and, as usual in opera, I was unable to hear the words. It was a beautiful plot, and moved me vastly, so that when it reached what seemed to me a perfect tragic end, and the curtain fell, my eyes were full of tears. I reached for my hat and was half-way up the aisle before I noticed that the rest of the audience were still seated. Then I realized that they were waiting for another act, on which the curtain rose in due course. Evidently my plot was not the librettist's; but having enjoyed mine thoroughly, I did not spoil it by waiting to see the end of his. In the same way



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Shaw found in Wagner's works exactly what he put there; namely, a full load of Shavian social philosophy. Neatly extracting it from the composer like a conjurer or a surgeon, he put it into a volume called *The Perfect Wagnerite*, and passed it to the public. *The Perfect Shavian* would have been as true a title for this treatise on the New Music, just as his later volume on the New Drama, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, was a distillation of the quintessence of Shaw.

Two Shavian anecdotes belonging to this period must find room here. In the first, Bernard Shaw is attending a fashionable London musicale at a private house in his professional capacity. Asked by his hostess what he thought of the new violinist whom she had launched that evening, Shaw, beaming, said that he reminded him of Paderewski. After a moment's hesitation the nonplussed lady pointed out that Paderewski was not a violinist. Shaw agreed. 'Just so, madam, just so!' On the other occasion a street musician was playing his instrument when Bassetto happened to come along. The itinerant held out his cap. 'Press!' said the critic, and passed on.

Both stories have the authentic Shavian ring. The first repartee reveals a new Shaw, one no longer ill at ease in society, discordant, crudely self-assertive, and an insufferable outsider, but one moving about freely on the inside, at ease and sure of his ground, politely armed with smile and rapier, and, even if experiencing shyness, confident that he can conceal it. The second, monosyllabic though it is, marks a small mine of Shavian information.

The wit of the man; its easy spontaneity; its

hardness and coldness; the man's impulse to self-advertise; his almost pedantic regard for facts, and his habit of emphasizing them to all and sundry; his scrupulous attention to money matters, in this case by avoiding payment; his hatred of poverty in all its forms, and his avoidance of all its concrete embodiments: all these, I think, without stretching the imagination too far, can be read into the sparkle of that one word, 'Press!'

Bassetto reigned on *The Star* for two years, and made good. He had made his mark: that was all that mattered for the moment. He had escaped from the penury of his novel writing days and, able to support himself, could look the world in the face, no man's slave. In fact, he was open to offers, and offers came. One came from Frank Harris, then editor of the *Saturday Review*, who proposed that Shaw should join his staff as musical critic, this time under his own name. Shaw accepted the offer, thereby nearly trebling his salary from two guineas to six pounds a week. After a further four years under Harris he found that he could no longer write on music without repeating himself, and was honest enough to say so. Harris accordingly transferred him to his paper's drama department; and there, as dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, he worked successfully until the spring of 1898. By that time he had become both utterly exhausted and a playwright of established and infamous reputation.

It would be untrue to say that Bernard Shaw was bored by the plays his new profession forced him to go and see; they exasperated and irritated him far too much to bore him. What kind of play graced or disgraced the London theatre in the nineties?

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Apart from Shakespeare, whom Irving butchered nightly at the Lyceum to make an actor-manager's holiday, there was the fashionable play; and this dealt with but the one topic of Love, generally in the debased form of clandestine adultery. The love plot was standardized and mass-produced, and only its decorations, or twists as they were called, were varied by the dexterous craftsmanship of men like Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. The skill with which such eminent playwrights served up the same dish, and by garnishing it afresh passed it to a public that the box-office proved was always greedy for more, in Shaw's eyes only aggravated the offence: for it was the dish itself that made his gorge rise. Love? Ugh! Love is not Bernard Shaw's strong suit. He is no Latin.

It would be incorrect to say that Love was Shaw's blind spot, because he does see it; and it makes him see red. Love appears to him not so much a temptation as a nuisance. Consequently he rebels against it as a tyranny and a waste of time. He makes Sir Isaac Newton say: 'Women enter a philosopher's life only to disturb it. They expect too much attention.' He has never written a love play, or even a love scene or sentence, that is recognizable as such. He cannot; and even if he could I doubt whether he would. Where he finds Love glorified in the works of others, he writes deliberately loveless counterparts of his own. Thus his *Caesar and Cleopatra*, in which the queen is nothing but the elderly emperor's kitten, is his protest against the love plot of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*; *Man and Superman*, his protest against the popularity of profligates and libertines



in legend and history; and The Perfect Wagnerite, his protest against the sublime sensuousness of Tristan and Isolde. Himself capable of such moral passions as righteous indignation and intellectual honesty, and of expressing them supremely well, Shaw seems incapable of expressing the passions of the senses in any of their forms, earthly or transcendent. In the plays the portrayal of these passions is intended, one supposes, when characters begin to call each other by such pet endearments as Beedledumkins, and their height reached when those characters become acutely conscious of each other as biological instruments of procreation, the moment of supreme ecstasy being easily recognized as that at which the Shavian lover likens his betrothed to a female spider. To Shaw, love is at best a biological necessity, and a harmless diversion: at worst an enemy that clouds the judgment and muddies the fountains of thought.

Finding this enemy enthroned in the theatre, he attacked it, calling upon the Puritans to rescue the playhouse from its toils and snares as they had rescued it once before from its profanities and salacities.

In calling upon the Puritans Shaw was calling upon himself. And here we approach the heart of the matter, for the critic in Bernard Shaw is Puritan to the tips of his fastidious fingers. To the Puritan life is not an experience to be enjoyed fruitfully, but a pilgrimage to be undertaken purposefully. The way is beset with ambushes and wiles, with Temptations and Giants; it lies through the Valley of the Shadow; and the purpose is to arrive at the end triumphant and unscathed, there to be mercifully

released from the Great Burden one has carried. On that perilous journey pleasures will delay one; best avoid them, then. Spiritually the Puritan is a brave man, indeed the bravest, for he would see God face to face, unfearful of the brightness of His countenance. Nothing and nobody must intervene between him and God; be it the perfume of incense, a Black Stone at Mecca, a village priest, a prayer book, or the Virgin Mary and all the Saints, all must be denounced and ruthlessly set aside or demolished as idols or as interlopers. The Puritan's quarrel with stained glass windows and Gothic cathedrals is not that they are not beautiful, but that they are so beautiful that his eye is content to rest on them when it should be piercing beyond them along the strait and narrow way. If a man is entranced by organ music, how can he hear the heavenly choirs? Thus the Puritan eschews pleasures for two reasons. They delay his journey, and they obscure his vision. The famous remark that bear-baiting ought to be stopped not because it gave pain to the bear, but pleasure to the spectator, has its modern counterparts. Even Mr Winston Churchill once delivered himself of a wholly puritanical observation, when in introducing a Budget to the House of Commons he declared that the desirability of a financial measure could be judged by its unpopularity. To the Puritan, in short, life is real, life is earnest: unpleasant, but exciting, and full of purpose and fight.

Bernard Shaw could sit for this picture without greatly distorting either himself or it. Bunyan is his favourite author, *The Pilgrim's Progress* his favourite book. He has sought God fearlessly and found Him face to face (his discovery that God is

for him as yet only a half-blind, half-conscious Purpose, is by the way). For pleasures, as such, Bernard Shaw cares nothing. They are only pleasant tonics to brace him for better work. What is one to think of a man who, amid the sunshine and scenery and bougainvillea of Madeira, chooses to write an introduction to a treatise on prisons and punishment? Only that, apart from being bored by the social life of a smart hotel, he can never be happy except in harness. Indeed, is there not something of the masochist about the Puritan in Shaw? When he writes to Ellen Terry: 'Oh, Ellen, I am the world's packhorse, and it beats my lean ribs unmercifully,' there is a sort of satisfaction about the statement, almost a relish in the groan. Or when he writes from the Riviera: 'I was born to bite the north wind, not to soak in this lukewarm Reckitt's blue purlieu of gamblers,' we sense not only a distrust of pleasure and a dismay at enjoyment, but almost a positive longing for the sting of pain. Careful, though! In these Freudian days of a little knowledge a little analysis goes a long way. If we are not on our guard we shall be calling Bernard Shaw a sadist too, simply because he has said that it annoys him to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable, and that he has to do something about it. Masochist and sadist! Well, aren't we all, after our fashion?

However that may be, there can be no doubt that Bernard Shaw possesses the high moral purpose that marks the true Puritan. Indeed, he may be said to possess very little else, for all his other possessions are made subservient to this one; except the sense of comic anticlimax, and this, being



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inherited, he possesses in spite of himself, for it is always getting in his way, and defeating his purpose. His plays are so consistently purposeful that when he occasionally writes one—The Six of Calais, for instance—with no particular moral purpose, its lack of message bewilders his critics and throws them into confusion.

Now if a man is intensely conscious of his purpose, and intensely determined to make his message heard, he will choose to deliver it on the radio or in the Albert Hall rather than in a place used exclusively for entertainment, such as a cabaret. But Bernard Shaw had no choice. The theatre was his job, his office, and his workshop, and he instinctively knew that it was there, within the theatre's then unhallowed precincts, that he had to deliver his message. Alas! The fashionable theatre was not unlike a cabaret, especially when judged by Puritan standards; for, strange to tell, people went to the theatre to be entertained, or amused, or moved, or thrilled; in short, to enjoy themselves, it being left to Shaw to persuade them to go in order to think. Nevertheless, Shaw was not displeased with the possibilities of his future pulpit, convinced as he was that 'fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective instrument of moral propaganda in the world.' He also knew that the theatre's audience was vast, catholic, and of all classes. He was displeased only with the frivolous goings-on of the people then in possession. In other words, what was chiefly wrong was that the theatre was only a theatre and not platform and pulpit as well.

Shaw therefore characteristically set about elevating

the theatre—at least, on paper. He denied that the theatre was the exclusive preserve of well-bred actor-managers catering for well-fed audiences with sensuous plays written by well-paid playwrights. That merely pleasurable arrangement by no means attained the Shavian standard. If Bernard Shaw was to work in the theatre, then the theatre must be made, in his eyes at any rate, a place in which he could work as a social reformer and revolutionary philosopher. Only if it had a high moral purpose could the Puritan approach it. And so for him the theatre becomes ‘a factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, an armoury against despair and dullness, and a temple of the Ascent of Man.’ In short, a serious affair. ‘I claimed for it,’ he continues, seating himself with naïve but conscious superbity between Pontiffs and Greeks, ‘that it is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages and much more important than the Church was in London in the years under review. A theatre to me is a place “where two or three are gathered together.” The apostolic succession from Eschylus to myself is as serious and as continuously inspired as that younger institution, the apostolic succession of the Christian Church.’

It was easy to carve noble names on the theatre’s outside, and to hang up a sign with Temple on it instead of Cabaret, but not so easy to evict the goddess of love who held court nightly on the stage within. The sight of that abandoned woman, sensuous, sentimental, fashionable and, worst of all, successful, rendered the stage in Shaw’s eyes more loathsome than the Augean stables. He would

clean it out, smiting with his pitchfork any that got in his way. Thus, as a critic, Bernard Shaw was greatly prejudiced. This he not only admitted, but vigorously asserted, summarizing his views thus: 'I have, I think, always been a Puritan in my attitude towards Art. I am as fond of fine music and handsome buildings as Milton was, or Cromwell, or Bunyan; but if I found that they were becoming the instruments of a systematic idolatry of sensuousness, I would hold it good statesmanship to blow every cathedral in the world to pieces with dynamite, organ and all, without the least heed to the screams of theatre critics and cultured voluptuaries. And when I see that the nineteenth century has crowned the idolatry of Art with the deification of Love, so that every poet is supposed to have pierced to the holy of holies when he has announced that Love is Supreme, or the Enough, or the All, I feel that Art was safer in the hands of the most fanatical of Cromwell's major-generals than it will be if it ever gets into mine. The pleasures of the senses I can sympathize with and share; but the substitution of sensuous ecstasy for intellectual activity and honesty is the very devil.' But love is a force of nature, and though the pitchfork be Shaw's *tamen usque recurrit*. Moreover, the theatre has many stages, and on one or other of them there is room for every kind of play. Shaw, therefore, did not succeed in banishing the goddess of love from the theatre: he banished her only from his own plays. But by proving to her that in the theatre's firmament there were other stars, which, though colder, could be made to shine as brightly as herself, he at least made her look to her laurels.



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Two other things cumbered the stage as Shaw pitchforked merrily away trying to clear it of emotion to make room for thought: Romance, and the 'well made' play of the Scribe or Sardou pattern. These plays simply are not true, the rational two-eyed Irishman declared, nor their characters real. The heroes are nothing but heroic, the villains nothing but villainous! Show me in life a villain without finer moments or a hero without his weak spot. If this is Romance, it is false, and I am out to kill it. Romance at least should be colourful, and where is the colour in a jigsaw puzzle in which all the pieces have been dipped in a bucket of white-wash or a jar of lampblack? Besides, I distrust Romance anyway; it is dangerous; people may mistake it for Reality, and believing it, swallow it whole. Do not mislead the people, for they are on a pilgrimage, nor tempt them from the narrow way of truth. Beware of this siren who, as the curtain falls and wedding bells ring, cries out, And They Lived Happily Ever After! Do not believe her. I will take you behind the scenes for the good of your soul, and show you how impossible it is for that fatally romantic couple to live happily for six months, or even six weeks, let alone Ever After, under the existing marriage laws. I will show you, too, how that gallant soldier is an arrant coward at heart; how that benign old priest who brings such comfort to his village flock lost his faith in God long ago; how that great leader of men is really under his wife's thumb; and how that notorious sweater of labour, grown rich by grinding the faces of the poor, faints at the sight of blood and would not hurt a fly. In real life, I tell you, a human being

is composed of many saints and many sinners, of many strengths and many weaknesses; but in the 'well made' play there are neither human beings nor any life at all, only puppets and mechanism; and, except as mechanism, a *diabolus ex machina* is no more interesting than a *deus ex machina*, the employment of either being inexcusable in the work of a playwright who knows his business, which is to persuade his audience that they are watching real things happening to real people. In short, Bernard Shaw regarded the artificial 'well made' play, with its black-and-white population of puppets as Henry Ford is reported to regard history books—as bunk.

Thus week by week Shaw's pen was directed against, not the stage's failures, but its darlindest successes, against the very rage and fashion of the day. But he was not merely destructive. He wanted to introduce the New Drama (in the nineties everything was New) of which Ibsen was the acknowledged pioneer and master. And what was the New Drama? Well, if we call the Old Drama society drama, the New we may call sociological drama. The trouble with the New Drama was that no one of any prominence on the London stage would look at it. It was not only new and therefore a risk, but in the nostrils of managers it positively stank. It smelt of drains; it dealt with syphilis; it unshuttered homes, revealing unconventional wives not only wishful but apparently capable of walking out on their husbands in the most home-wrecking and heretical way. And because managers held their noses and averted their gaze from what seemed to them nothing but sociological treatises in dramatic form and execrable

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taste, Bernard Shaw, his head full of Ibsen, never let them alone for long. Painstakingly he explained in his weekly cascade of brilliant talk how the New Drama was important because it dealt with life instead of art, because it presented real people facing urgent social problems, and, above all, because it came armed with a philosophy of life and impregnated with a purpose. Just as his musical horizon was filled with the rising sun of Wagner, so in the theatre his eye was focused on Ibsen's penetrating searchlight as it played on each human social institution in turn.

✓ A drama with a purpose! That was why Ibsen appealed to Shaw. For if any one is to be classed by Bernard Shaw among the very great, he must have a purpose and a philosophy of life. An artist without these Shaw may admire or envy, but he will never render him full allegiance. Arguing from this standpoint, Shaw was able to drag into the arena no less a personage than Shakespeare. Because in the poet's works there is discoverable neither purpose nor philosophy, therefore, said Shaw, Shakespeare is less great than Ibsen. Thus he hoped to hoist Ibsen by pulling Shakespeare down.

In Shaw's hands Shakespeare functioned as a two-edged sword and fulfilled a double purpose. For by belittling Shakespeare Shaw belittled Irving's reign at the Lyceum, where the Elizabethan, or as much of him as Irving pleased to leave uncut, reigned gorgeous and supreme. And any move to discredit Irving professionally Shaw considered legitimate, because Irving, exercising immense influence as archbishop of the theatre in general,



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refused to admit the New Drama to his cathedral, the Lyceum. He refused to admit even its existence, except as a troublesome hornet buzzing on occasional Sunday nights at the Independent Theatre, or winging and stinging its revolting way round the provinces. So much the worse, then, for Irving, the Lyceum, and Shakespeare. If the purposeless and pessimistic Shakespeare was standing in the way of the purposeful and philosophic Ibsen, then Shakespeare was no good. Shakespeare Must Go. In this way Shaw used Shakespeare as a stick with which to bastinado Irving.

In a fight one uses any weapons within reach, and after it these are normally laid aside. It is a little surprising therefore to find, now that the New Drama is old and Ibsen reposes quietly on a shelf, that Bernard Shaw still persists in his complaint that Shakespeare lacks moral purpose and fails to expound a philosophy of life. It is a curious complaint. To criticize a man whose fame rests wholly on richness of imagination and almost godlike felicity of utterance, for failing to propound a coherent philosophy for audiences bent on entertainment, is perhaps permissible; but it is irrelevant. One might as reasonably criticize a bird for not pushing roots into the earth like a tree, or give bad marks to a sunfish for not growing a wonderfully useful tail like a beaver's, or complain that Einstein's discoveries are somehow at fault because they are not stated in impassioned blank verse. Shakespeare differs from Ibsen in kind, as eggs differ from apples, and to criticize Shakespeare in terms of Ibsen is like trying to multiply three eggs by four apples—it cannot be done. If Shakespeare

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were asked what was the purpose behind his plays I doubt if he would understand the question. Pressed, he would probably answer that their purpose was to provide his friends at the Globe Theatre with good parts, and wasn't he a playwright, so how could he help writing plays anyhow? And in such an answer there would be enough simple truth, I think, to silence all critical chatter.

These trumpetings of Bernard Shaw on the subject of Shakespeare are interesting none the less, because they reveal how deeply Shaw is imbued with sense of purpose. Purpose is not the core of his being, it is his being, and he regards himself as the instrument and embodiment of a Purpose greater than his own. It offends and shocks such a man that a great poet like Shakespeare should be possessed by no apparent purpose; and if you were to insist that the very purposelessness of Shakespeare accounted in a measure for his tumbling, chaotic greatness, he could only pray heaven to have mercy on your soul.

Shaw's strictures on Shakespeare doubtless gave rise to the popular fiction that Shaw has laid claim to be greater than Shakespeare. He, of course, never did so; although he has only himself to blame—or congratulate—for the current belief that he did. What he said in effect was this: 'To me, the greatest men are those who have messages of hope for groping mankind, and the ability to deliver them. By this test Bunyan, say; and Ibsen, and Goethe, and Shelley, as well as Micah, and most of the other Hebrew Prophets, were greater men than Shakespeare, who was a poet-playwright with no message; or, for the discerning, one of pessimism,

which is worse and more deadly than no message at all. Now come I. I, too, am a playwright: and I have a message. It is one of hope, and I have the ability to deliver it. Ladies and gentlemen, you may draw your own conclusions.' But that he excelled or could even be compared with Shakespeare on Shakespeare's own ground, he never said.

The ground common to both Shakespeare and Shaw is the English language. Shaw regards its riches simply as material to be used, for a purpose: but the purposeless Shakespeare adds to them, and makes life the richer. Phrases of Shakespeare's coining have passed by the score into the texture of the language and into the soul of the people, to live there immortal. But it is difficult to recall a single phrase of Shaw's that is even memorable, much less an addition to the treasury of language. In the realm of word music Shakespeare remains supreme, native to the place, and Shaw approaches its multi-coloured pleasaunce more as critic, a musical critic, than competitor.



## CHAPTER IV

### DRAMATIST

THERE was one way of converting satisfied Victorians to his views, and Bernard Shaw took it. He began to write plays himself. And now, fifty years later, he is still at it.

For five years, and in England for a good many more, his plays fell on stony ground. Indeed, if he had not already made a name for himself as critic, musical and dramatic, revolutionary pamphleteer, and Socialist orator, it is doubtful whether his plays would have fared at first any better than his novels. The same affronting, veil-tearing, convention-ridiculing opinions which had marked his novels now marked his plays, and in polite society such opinions remained as unacceptable as ever. The fellow had forgotten nothing and learnt nothing, except to return to the fray better equipped and more suitably mounted.

In England the first really effective blow for the New Drama was struck with the 1889 production of Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*, by Charles Charrington and Janet Achurch; the second, with the production of *Ghosts* by J. T. Grein's then nascent Independent Theatre. It was for this organization, the Left Theatre of its day, that in 1892 Shaw completed a play which he had started in collaboration with William Archer seven years before, and laid aside because he had used up the whole of Archer's plot in the first half of the first act. Digging it out and completing it, Shaw handed the play to Mr

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Grein, who promptly produced it at the Royalty Theatre in Dean Street, which closed its doors in 1939. The play, called *Widowers' Houses*, dealt with the evils of slum landlordism. It was not a success; but it was a shock. Its dare-devil author left the theatre with the laurels of notoriety hanging thick on his horns, and woke up next morning to find himself infamous.

So the following year he tried again, hugely enjoying his diabolical reputation and fully realizing that even bad publicity is still publicity. This time, in 1893, the play was about the New Woman, and he named it *The Philanderer*. Unfortunately it had to be shelved because the title role required the acting abilities of a Charles Wyndham, and these the slender resources of the Independent Theatre were unable to provide. Moreover, it was doubtful whether any fashionable West End star would have risked his reputation by appearing in a play by the author of *Widowers' Houses*, even if Grein had had unlimited financial backing: better appear in a nigger minstrel troupe than in Shaw. With nothing to lose and everything to gain, the undaunted author immediately wrote *Mrs Warren's Profession*, a play about prostitution, Mrs Warren being a purveyor of the trade. This was too much for the Lord Chamberlain, who stepped in and forbade Mrs Warren the stage. It was also too much for Mr Grein. And also for Bernard Shaw, who, with the impasse created by the Censor, ceased to function as abortive playwright in ordinary to the Independent Theatre.

Whilst serving in that capacity, however, Shaw had proved two things: first, that he was a

write plays; and second, that he could compete successfully with all comers in the choice of unsavoury subjects for his plots. Henrik Ibsen, as the saying goes, had nothing on Bernard Shaw.

Of all the names hurled at Bernard Shaw, and they are legion, probably the Laughing Ibsen is the one best suited to him as he was in the early nineties. Then, as always, he could inject laughter into everything he touched, even into such unpromising material as slums and prostitution. The Norwegian, of course, was already a translated and established novelty in London when the Irishman was aspiring to recognition as a playwright, and it was perhaps inevitable, however ridiculous, that the younger man should be accused of stealing his ideas from the older. Ridiculous, because no one would try to disparage Lenin, for instance, by accusing him of 'stealing' his ideas from Marx. Because of his political inclinations, Lenin very naturally and properly took what Marx had to offer him, and bent it to his own purposes; and was a follower of Marx only in the sense that he was born later. Only in that sense was Shaw a follower of Ibsen.

The truth is, that towards the end of the nineteenth century the drama, no less than politics and religion, needed an infusion of new life, and the consciousness of this need produced various men in various places, Ibsen and Shaw and Chekov among them, for its practically simultaneous fulfilment. This consideration, however, did not prevent the charge of plagiarism from being levelled at Shaw. In one of the controversies fought out in the newspapers he was specifically charged with filching his ideas not



only from Ibsen, but from Strindberg, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Tolstoy. Everybody who was anybody entered the arena for or against, and for a long time it seemed as if the only uninterested person was Bernard Shaw. At length he too made his contribution to the din. He rebuked the illiterate English theatre critics who, whenever they met with an unfamiliar idea, always assumed that it must have come from abroad, although it would have stared them in the face if they had ever heard of such men as Samuel Butler or Herbert Spencer, not to mention Shelley and Darwin, or had ever opened a contemporary English book of any importance. He asked those who contended solemnly that Nietzsche was the first man to point out that mere morality led nowhere, whether they had ever heard of Bunyan or come across his Bad-man. He then described the street he lived in, his neighbours, their habits, the sanitary accommodation for washerwomen, the vestry on which he sat, the men who made up its committee, and how their ideals prevented them from descending so low as to think about washerwomen at all, and concluded: 'If a dramatist living in a world like this has got to go to books for his ideas and inspiration he must be both blind and deaf. Most dramatists are.' And that ended that, in controversy Bernard Shaw being adept at writing *Finis* with a final flourish that really does finish off his opponents, at any rate for the moment.

Shaw still lived with his mother, but no longer on her. They had moved from Kensington to Fitzroy Square (No. 29, Shavidolaters may note), in St Pancras, of which borough he finally became a

councillor and vestryman in 1897. Natural energy, social curiosity, and a sense of public spirit thrust a West End dramatic critic into the grimy public life of North West One, and it is safe to say that Shaw the dramatist drew his inspiration from the observations of Shaw the social reformer. Having myself helped to administer the 1916 Military Service Act in that same borough, with its square miles of miserable dingy streets straggling from Holborn through Islington to Chalk Farm, and having seen the undersized, underfed bodies of the majority of its male population stripped naked for medical examination, I can testify that in Shaw's search for objects for social reform his difficulty must have been, not in finding, but in avoiding them. No one who knows both Shaw and St Pancras can be surprised, therefore, that his first play dealt with slums and landlords. To deal with anything else would have seemed almost a breach of trust.

Unpleasant plays, however, were getting Bernard Shaw nowhere. The Independent Theatre was not the theatre proper. As its name implied, it was independent of it. Shaw was after the citadel itself, held solid and officered by, not the advanced and impecunious Greins, but the immensely successful Irvings, Alexanders, Forbes-Robertsons, Wyndhams, and Beerbohm Trees. So he began to write Pleasant plays instead. They fairly tumbled from his pen. In the three years beginning with 1894 there followed in quick succession, *Arms and The Man*; *Candida*; *The Man of Destiny*; *You Never Can Tell*; and *The Devil's Disciple*: their author recording the fact that he has never experienced any difficulty in peopling his imagination with

characters and setting them off talking to each other nineteen to the dozen. Indeed, his faculty for words is such that the difficulty is to stop his creatures talking.

Surprisingly, these plays fared little better than the Unpleasant ones. It was true that the usual Shavian vein of satire ran through all of them, and that London has always avoided satire like the plague; but the obstinate ill luck which attended these plays initially was due, at least in part, to what can only be called the unfortunate personal influence of their author. Bernard Shaw seems to have been the worst possible vendor of his own wares; an inability shared by every one susceptible to 'author's disease.' This is a common malady. It induces in the patient the fond delusion that, having written a play, he or she is the person best qualified to know what to do with it. There could be no greater mistake. By the time a play is finished its author is far too close to it to be capable of judging it correctly. He knows it too well. If he can still delight in its good points, it is because he has become used to its bad ones. Now since no playwright in his senses writes plays to please only himself, but writes them to be produced and to please the public, it is not his but the public's approval that counts; and the accredited parties normally responsible to the author for adjusting his play so that it shall win that approval, are the agent, the producer, the manager, and the actor. But Shaw will have as little truck as possible with these highly skilled people. Always liable to author's disease, he has never employed an agent. In Sidney Howard's play, *The Silver Cord*, an



energetic, capable, and in many ways brilliant woman brings up her children on the assumption that Mother Knows Best, with disastrous results to all concerned, and I can never manage to put her quite out of my mind when I think of Bernard Shaw's appearance in the commercial theatre market of the nineties, where he tried to sell his plays by reiterating to all prospective buyers that Shaw Knew Best. In other words, he had a well-deserved reputation in the theatre for being 'difficult.' And although old age has brought him a measure of wisdom in this respect (but he would call it an unwilling toleration due only to the sapping of his energies, and not wisdom), he can still, on occasion, make himself enough of a nuisance to prevent or hamper the production of his plays. Thus when *Candida* was produced in the West End in 1936 the responsible management and producer took the precaution of letting it be known that the author would be decidedly unwelcome at rehearsals: a step probably as necessary as it was unprecedented. In the films, too, it took Bernard Shaw years to realize that his plays, however perfect they might be for the stage, were wholly unsuitable for the screen as they stood. Indeed, it is doubtful whether he would ever have realized this without the costly lesson of the film of *Arms and The Man*, which, since he insisted that it should be made almost word for word as a replica of the play, turned out a pronounced and dismal failure.

By pointing to these symptoms of author's disease I must not be taken to imply that Bernard Shaw cannot be of the most practical and inspiring help to actors and producers if he chooses, or that he

would not have been a brilliant director or producer of plays himself had he adopted that profession. His work as critic is studded with pearls of actor's and producer's wisdom, of which the following is a fair example. 'In playing Shakespeare play *to* the lines, *through* the lines, *on* the lines, but never between the lines. There simply isn't time for it. You would not stick five bars' rest into a Beethoven symphony to pick up your drumsticks; and similarly you must not stop the Shakespeare orchestra for business. Nothing short of a procession or a fight should make anything so extraordinary as a silence in a Shakespeare performance.' Rather, I mean only that if two men ride the same horse one must ride behind. Once a play is accepted for production and a producer commissioned to produce it, he and he alone is responsible, not only for such simple matters as the routine of rehearsals, but for the play's ultimate success or failure. A producer worth his salt will shoulder that responsibility; but he will not share it. It is what he is paid for. Perhaps I should add that as an occasional producer of plays I am a bit of an expert at detecting author's disease, and I should certainly add, having taken part in the ill-fated film of *Arms and The Man*, that I write on the subject with the utmost prejudice.

At all events, what happened to Shaw's comedies in the nineties was this. *Arms and The Man* was produced, but it lost money, the takings averaging only £23 2s. 5d. per performance for eleven weeks. *Candida*, not a difficult play to place, or to act, had to wait three years, until 1897, before it saw the footlights, and then they were provincial and not

West End ones. With regard to *The Man of Destiny* Shaw wrote to Ellen Terry begging, commanding, coaxing, urging her to persuade Irving to play its Napoleon, and when in due course Irving offered to buy the play, Shaw, for reasons best known to himself (for he elaborates them with such detail of self-justification in his letters to poor Ellen that none but she could bother to grasp them), took umbrage. The negotiations broke down. Shaw tried to reopen them by writing a clever letter to Irving. But Irving did not write clever letters; he wrote only business letters. The end is history: Irving did not play in *The Man of Destiny*, and the little play finally crept into the world by way of Croydon. Then, again, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* was written specially for Ellen Terry, but when it was finally produced by the Stage Society, Ada Rehan having in the meantime refused the leading part, Ellen Terry was there, but in the audience. So the pitiable tale continues, with Shaw bungling away brilliantly, never in the wrong, of course, and always his own enemy. The climax came with *You Never Can Tell*. Deliberately designed to fit the fashionable stage, and with not enough satire in it to keep even the starchiest white shirt-front away from the stalls, this play had been accepted by Frederick Harrison and Cyril Maude for production at the Haymarket Theatre Royal. But after two weeks of floundering rehearsals, with the author in prowling attendance, the confused company broke up and, much to the management's relief, Bernard Shaw withdrew the play. After one of the earliest rehearsals he had written to Ellen Terry: 'They think me a very harmless author so far. Wait until I



begin silently and unobtrusively to get on their nerves a little.' This no doubt was written in a playful vein, but there is no smoke without fire.

The catastrophe at the Haymarket occurred in April 1897. It severed Bernard Shaw's connection with the theatre. In calling off *You Never Can Tell*, he in effect called off his troops after repeated attempts to storm the fort of the London theatre. Thenceforward he would employ other tactics. If the fort would not yield to frontal attacks he would try to capture it by a wide encircling movement; in other words, by publishing his plays. In the following year, accordingly, he availed himself of his literary skill to prepare for the reading public two volumes of his much-tried plays, making them formidable but entertaining affairs by fortifying them, after the manner of Dryden, with prefatory essays in which he could blow off steam to his heart's content. As for the theatre, let it wait: he could bide his time. Actually, he had no alternative.

Shaw's experience as a novel writer had accustomed him to the disappointment of rejected manuscripts, and his early experience as a playwright only steeled him to an almost superhuman insensitiveness to praise and blame alike, until he eventually ceased to care greatly whether his plays were performed or not. However, his behaviour over his early plays, which at the time seemed so wantonly and foolishly despotic, was on the whole justified by subsequent events, when the whirligig of time brought the plays into general favour, particularly outside England.

Perhaps I have not been altogether fair. The reluctance of the theatre to open its doors to the Shavian drama was by no means wholly due to the

truculence of its author, or to the too clever way in which he mishandled managers. It was largely the theatre's fault. The theatre then was so completely divorced from all contemporary thought, world movements, and outside interests, that when a writer appeared who was interested in nothing else it simply did not know what he was talking about. And when he proposed that the fresh air from this outside world should blow in great gusts on to a stage where the air was stale with the grease paint of posturing romantic heroes and of heroines bursting with passion and sawdust, the stage door-keeper had strict orders to say Not at Home. The fear of mere change and the utter inability even to understand, let alone appreciate, anything new or fresh, were apparent from the first. Even the trivial *You Never Can Tell* was returned by George Alexander with a note to the author saying: 'When I got to the end, I had no more idea what you meant by it than a tom cat.' Actors were equally dense, equally bound by tradition. Two experienced members of the Haymarket company resigned from their parts in *You Never Can Tell* and when asked why, one of them threw up his hands and said: 'No laughs and no exits!'

As with Corno di Bassetto's musical criticism, Bernard Shaw's first care with his published plays was to make them readable, even by people who never set foot inside a theatre and were totally ignorant of its back-stage jargon. The plays were to be as easy to read as a novel. Thus, for example, the reader was not to be brusquely confronted with a string of characters, but gently and graphically introduced to them one by one as they entered the

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story. This accounts for the omission of the usual list of *Dramatis Personae* in Shaw's plays. But perhaps it is in his stage directions that the quality of readability is most noticeable. Always in those days, and even now in spite of Shaw's excellent example, playwrights were content to address themselves to the stage manager and scene shifters, and the reader, vainly struggling to create the illusion indispensable for a play, had to make what he could of such workmanlike statements as that So-and-So was 'Discovered, seated, C.' with a 'Door U.R.' and a 'Window D.L.' The lay reader may respect such remarks as the trade notes from one intelligent technician to another, but he will be paying respect where none is due. For it is a fact that not even the most expert professional play-reader can always be sure which is Left and which is Right, the playwright nine times out of ten failing to state whether he is writing from the audience's point of view or from the actor's. Probably the best plays are those written from the audience's viewpoint, for, since the audience is the play's ultimate judge, the playwright who knows his job will take care to write his play from the same angle as that from which the audience is going to see it. Then, what is called Stage Left becomes Right. Be that as it may, certainly the reader, if he visualizes himself anywhere in a theatre while he is reading a play, does so in a place facing the stage and not on it. The theatre has been well named the Cinderella of the Arts, and the confusion that still exists concerning this elementary matter of Right and Left shows that this Cinderella, lovable though she is and always will be, is too lazy and too wayward even to brush her



own hearth and keep it tidy. But in Shaw's mind there was no confusion, and he took care that there should be none in his readers' minds either. Writing always from the spectator's viewpoint, in which Right is Right and Left is Left, Shaw's devices to banish confusion are both varied and arresting. It is twelve years or more since I first produced *John Bull's Other Island*, but I still remember its sparrow. Let me find the little fellow again in my bookshelves: he will show us how Bernard Shaw transforms the crude jargon of stage directions into literary delights. Here he is.

Great George Street, Westminster, is the address of Doyle and Broadbent, civil engineers. On the threshold one reads that the firm consists of Mr Laurence Doyle and Mr Thomas Broadbent, and that their rooms are on the first floor. Most of these rooms are private; for the partners, being bachelors and bosom friends, live there; and the door marked Private, next to the clerks' office is their domestic sitting room as well as their reception room for clients. Let me describe it briefly from the point of view of a sparrow on the window sill. The outer door is in the opposite wall, close to the right hand corner. Between this door and the left hand corner is a hatstand and a table consisting of large drawing boards on trestles, with plans, rolls of tracing paper, mathematical instruments and other draughtsmen's accessories on it. In the left hand wall is a fireplace, and the door of an inner room between the fireplace and our observant sparrow. Against the right hand wall . . .

And so it continues for another thirty or forty lines, until the reader not only knows where he is, but can move about blindfold and feel thoroughly at home.

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No other playwright, except perhaps Sir James Barrie, exhibits such solicitude for his readers, and Barrie, I think, is too often inclined to begin a play as if it was a fairy story or a novel. Instead of remaining on the stage, pointing out This and introducing us to That, he is apt to invite us away from the scene altogether and to fly through the stage door, taking his characters with him. These flights are very pleasant, but they are not drama. Barrie's plays, however, had proved themselves stage successes, so that when he published them he could do what he liked to them and as far as possible free them from the limitations of the stage. Not so in Bernard Shaw's case, however, for few of his plays had been produced at all, while those that had been were unsuccessful. Shaw's task was therefore twofold: he had not only to make his plays readable, but also to persuade discerning managers and producers that they were eminently stageworthy in the practical sense. This he did, with his usual thoroughness, by describing all significant details of scene, furnishings, properties, business, movements, emphases, pauses, and all the other technical apparatus employed to bring a play to life on the stage, and with a consummate and unobtrusive literary skill. In short, he had to work with the mind of a stage carpenter as well as that of a philosopher. In preparing his plays for publication Shaw was evolving what was tantamount to a new art, certainly a new craft, and if there is any truth in that extraordinarily unsatisfactory definition about genius consisting of an infinite capacity for taking pains, then surely Bernard Shaw is the king of geniuses. He complained to Ellen

Terry that the work involved was a 'stupendous job.' This was in 1897. If it contributed to his breakdown in health about that time his consolation must be that to-day it has become a truism to say that a producer, even if a dolt, cannot go wrong if he will follow the Shavian stage directions faithfully.

The severance between Bernard Shaw and the commercial theatre was complete; and the breach has never really healed. A Shavian success in the West End is still a matter for surprise. Even the famous season at the Royal Court Theatre from 1904 to 1906, when Harley Granville-Barker acted as a link between Shaw and the commercial theatre in the person of J. E. Vedrenne, though it was all that could be desired in the way of an artistic furore, was a financial failure in the end.

Bernard Shaw never captured the citadel he assaulted so ardently in the nineties. He only awakened its occupants. And these good people, becoming used to the stranger at their gates, began to perceive the unique quality of the man, the queer strength behind his writing: in short, good parts for themselves. The result was that they consorted with the redbeard. I have said that Shaw never captured the citadel. In one sense he had no need to; for he had only to appear outside with a magnificent part, and one of the captains or generalissimos within would promptly open the gates. He entered, thrice-welcome; a grinning wolf, as it were, his jaws dripping with satire and his mouth full of sermons, carefully planning to wear the sheep's clothing of all the most romantic and seductive theatrical stars in turn. Thus, as he records, if Forbes-Robertson had not been there to

play it, he would not have written *Caesar and Cleopatra*; if Ellen Terry had never been born, *Captain Brassbound* would never have been converted; if Mrs Patrick Campbell had not inspired him as far back as 1897 with the comedic possibilities of a 'rascally flower girl'—an 'East end dona in an apron and three orange and red ostrich feathers'—he would not have written *Pygmalion*. This interplay between a creative artist and the human material that helps to inspire him is too complex and subconscious to be analysed profitably. It would be treating the whole process as too simple and conscious, therefore, to say that this or that play was specially written for this or that actor or actress, though this sometimes happened, *How He Lied to Her Husband* being written for the American actor Arnold Daly, for instance, and *Great Catherine* for Gertrude Kingston. Yet it is safe to say that the *Devil's Disciple*, *Saint Joan*, and *The Apple Cart*, to mention only three more plays, would not have taken the exact shape they did if William Terriss, Sybil Thorndike, and Cedric Hardwicke respectively had not been available, and in the author's mind when he wrote them.

The relations between Bernard Shaw and the artists who have appeared in his plays have always been in the long run conspicuously happy. From his long wooing of Ellen Terry by letter, down to the minute care he once took to coach an actor who was due to impersonate him in a play, his attitude to actors, even though they may ruin his plays, is one of inborn sympathy; for, as we shall see later, he is a considerable actor himself. As long as Bernard Shaw is in the theatre things are never dull.



The furies may be let loose, but they are always well-mannered. Sensitive himself, he assumes sensitiveness in others. Quick to wound, he is quicker to heal. The mischievous laughter wells up in the eyes, unrestrained by the quizzically frowning brows above them, until it explodes and Mrs Pat sweeps down to the footlights, and retaliates by crying out: 'One day you will eat a raw steak, Bernard Shaw, and then God help us poor women!'

But for all the furious fun and indefatigable work he can let loose in a theatre, Bernard Shaw is always more at home at his desk. At a rehearsal on a stage he can put only a score of people right. When back at his desk, his stage becomes the world, and putting that right is an occupation which he feels more suited to his powers. 'I require whole populations and historical epochs,' he says, 'to engage my interest seriously and make the writing machine [for that is what G. B. S. is] work at full speed and pressure.' At the bottom of his most hyperbolical remarks there is always a residue of truth, and the truth of this one he proved fully just a quarter of a century after making it, by writing *Saint Joan*, whose 'whole populations and historical epochs' engaged his interests so seriously that they almost made him forget Bernard Shaw, and so write what many consider his best play.







TOPICAL PRESS

*Mrs G. Bernard Shaw*



## CHAPTER V

### THE NINETIES

It was America that gave Bernard Shaw his first taste of solid financial success. In 1896 he had written a melodrama for William Terriss called *The Devil's Disciple*, and when that actor was murdered the play was accepted by Richard Mansfield, a prominent American actor-manager, and produced by him in New York in 1897. The results were so lucrative that by the following year Bernard Shaw had become rich enough to give up regular journalism and marry a lady of considerable independent means.

In his description of the wedding there is the familiar Shavian touch. 'I was very ill when I was married, altogether a wreck on crutches and in an old jacket which the crutch had worn to rags. I had asked my friends, Graham Wallas and Henry Salt, the biographer of Shelley and de Quincey, to act as witnesses; and, of course, in honour of the occasion they were dressed in their best clothes. The registrar never imagined I could possibly be the bridegroom: he took me for the inevitable beggar who completes all wedding processions. Wallas, who was considerably over six feet high, seemed to him to be the hero of the occasion; and he was proceeding calmly to marry him to my betrothed, when Wallas, thinking the formula rather strong for a mere witness, hesitated at the last moment and left the prize to me.' The



convalescent bridegroom was just on forty-two years of age at the time, and it is enough to say here that this marriage, though childless, has proved as unobtrusive and successful in its results as its circumstances were bizarre. Happy marriages, like happy nations, have no history; the world's vulturous newshawks pass them by as too clean to be interesting. There are still people who exclaim: 'Oh, *is* there a Mrs Shaw?' In doing so they are unconsciously paying high tribute to two people who, though living in the limelight, have yet managed to keep their private life private. How different from many modern so-called famous men and women, who, in an age when nothing succeeds like publicity, eagerly expose to the public gaze the details of their domestic life, knowing that the more unsavoury these are the higher the price they can charge for admission to view them.

What sort of man was it that Charlotte Frances Payne-Townshend led to the registrar of marriages?

Physically, to take the simpler matters first, he was noticeable in any company. It was not his beard, for with the Heir to the Throne and Prime Minister Lord Salisbury setting the example, beards were not unfashionable in the nineties. It was rather its colour, a true Scottish red, and the combination of it with a pair of up-tilting eyebrows and two tufts of hair sprouting from his fine high forehead. The result was a combination of Mephistopheles and Pan. His nose, big and blunt, gave the impression of a man who is well able and even anxious to stand up to blows; not a foxy nose, or in any sense a retreating one, but a pugnacious nose,

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and the reverse of finely chiselled. Then, unlike the donkey, Shaw has plenty of head above the ears. These, also red, 'are a Shaw speciality,' explains their owner, delightedly describing them with a kind of Dickensian exaggeration. 'They stick straight out like the doors of a triptych; and I was born with them fullsize, so that on windy days my nurse had to hold me by the waistband to prevent my being blown away when the wind caught them.' Prattling away thus in a letter to Ellen Terry, Bernard Shaw passes that final and most acid test for sense of humour—an ability to laugh at oneself. And the eyes? Blue and self-conscious. A pair of imps; chameleons; much of their thunder stolen by the eyebrows trying to assert their authority; an actor's eyes; windows of the mind to show his thoughts, complete with blinds to conceal them; piercing eyes, twinkling eyes, eyes that can look through and sometimes past you. Place this head on a tallish, lean, wiry, upright body, and if the picture is incomplete, the world's photograph album will complete it.

As an object Shaw has been a much photographed, much painted, and much sculptured man. Three busts and a mask by Rodin; two busts, a statuette and a full-size statue by Troubetskoy; and portraits by Augustus John, Sir William Rothenstein, Sir John Lavery, John Collier, do not exhaust the long catalogue in which one of the first names is that of Nellie Heath. Painting a picture of Shaw in 1896, she confessed that she was 'tremendously attracted by Shaw's red ears, and red hair, which grew on his forehead in two Satanic whirls.'

But Shaw's outside need not detain us; its appearance is as familiar as that of Queen Victoria, Father Christmas, or the devil. It is the inside that interests. What lies behind that noble brow, what goes on in that dome?

If I were allowed only one word, on pain of torture, with which to describe the mind of Bernard Shaw, I would very deliberately choose from the long list of possible ones the word healthy. I would choose this word because, since every word automatically suggests its opposite by contrast, healthiness is conspicuous only against a background of unhealthiness, and a healthy mind conscious of its healthiness only among diseased ones. This was precisely the case with Bernard Shaw. In order to appreciate this, and to see how Shaw, though he lived in the nineties, was never of them, and how his essential healthy-mindedness and peculiar buoyancy never allowed him to sink into their bogs of glorified decay, we must turn back for a moment to the nineties themselves.

A unique period in England's history, the nineties marked the end of a prodigious meal. The small island of England had been eating for more than half a century, and now she was swollen with empire. She had eaten quietly and skilfully and, above all, abundantly. She was immensely full, immensely satisfied. John Bull, that gross personification of middle-class commercialism that had long supplanted St George as the symbol of national inspiration and achievement, looked upon his Empire, and looked upon his Trade, and behold! both of them were good. His great paunch grew bigger

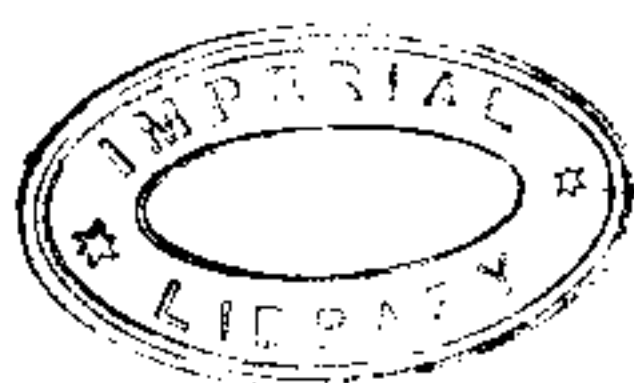




G.P.A.

*Corno di Bassetto, alias Bernard Shaw, aged 33*





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and bigger until it nearly burst its Union Jack. There was nothing more to be done but to sit tight and hold tight, and to rub his stomach as an aid to digestion. About such full-fed satiety there is a calm, but of the kind that goes before a storm. Since the law of life is change, all contentment carries the germ of discontentment in its core. As the petals of a flower unfold they expose to the sun for ripening the seeds of its own decay; and when the fruit is ripe, it falls. Dean Inge, watching the Diamond Jubilee, tells us how the very plenitude of that pomp filled him with foreboding for the future.

Every success involves a cost, and the success of empire abroad was achieved only at the cost of ugliness at home, especially in the industrial north. Early in the century Cobbett, bold lover of England, had called London the Great Wen; what would he have called the Potteries or Manchester when the century ended? The black smoke that lay over the industrial sores of the north seemed like a pall purposely placed there in order to hide human atrocities from the sight of heaven. In the mines women wore harness and walked on all-fours like animals, while at the cotton looms five-year-old children worked for such long hours that when they could no longer keep their eyes open they fell asleep, and so fell into the machinery and were cut to pieces: such horrors being suffered in the name of Trade and Empire. The spirit of darkness and ugliness entered the very homes of the people, where fathers beat their children with sadistic relish in the name of filial piety and the fifth commandment, and where the walls were hung with pictures



of the Landseer school, of which one of the distinguishing marks was the bloody realism of its stags at bay, bleeding hounds, dead fish, and wounded game.

This immense satisfaction and complacency of empire, with the ugliness attending it, produced its natural reaction. In politics a spur was given to Socialism, in religion to Atheism or Agnosticism, and in art to the cry of Art for Art's Sake. Art, it was urged, could have no truck with such a world. If that was life it were best to avoid it. If life was ugly and practical, then art must be beautiful and useless, and be careful to keep itself to itself. The art of the nineties, therefore, looking out upon the world for its inspiration, and seeing only John Bull's beflagged stomach filling the sky, decided to avert its gaze from a spectacle so Philistine, and feed upon itself. But art, unless it has its roots in life, is a dead art, and like all dead things soon decays. With devilish instinct its protagonists in the nineties perceived this, and proceeded to make a virtue of their secluded putrefaction. What was natural was wrong, what was decadent was good. Nature was barbaric, therefore she must be bettered. This movement, which turned its back on the sun and divorced itself from life and nature, had found for its god, Oscar Wilde; for its gadfly, Whistler; for its godfather, Walter Pater; for its illustrator, Aubrey Beardsley; and for disciples, pale wisps of creatures in whose rooms the Yellow Book lay decorously on the table and the scent of green carnations lay heavy on the air. It was an atmosphere which honest men found difficult to breathe, and its sickliness has been brought out pungently

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by Gilbert Chesterton in the fine poem which begins:

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the  
weather,  
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were young  
together.

Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;  
The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay.  
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came—  
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.  
Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,  
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a  
plume.

Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung;  
The world was very old indeed when you and I were  
young.

They twisted even decent sins to shapes not to be named:  
Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.

In this world moved Bernard Shaw, as perforce  
did every one who was connected with the arts pro-  
fessionally. The very mention of his name seems  
to clear the poisoned air a little. Here on the one  
hand were men, a whole school of them, who  
talked exquisitely, but only for effect; and on the  
other, a man who never talked for effect, but who,  
having something to say, took care always to say it  
as effectively as possible. Walter Pater would go  
for long walks turning over words in his mind to  
find the right one as though they had been pebbles  
in his pocket. To him and his neophytes, thoughts  
were merely the raw material for wonderful sen-  
tences, and these in turn were merely beautiful  
'jewels five words long.' They had so little to say  
that they had to be very careful how they said it.  
But Shaw, overflowing with material, was able to

let his style take care of itself. Abounding in ideas, he could afford to scatter them prodigally. For posing he had no time, and if he was pale, he was pale from work and abstemious habits, not from dissipation or design. While precious dilettantes spent their ample time keeping up Bohemian appearances, or nursing their reputations for wit by throwing little poisoned epigrams across fashionable dinner tables, Bernard Shaw spent his time writing Fabian tracts and learning to ride a bicycle. While the Wildes and the Whistlers, the Swinburnes and the Moores engaged in petty quarrels with each other over sonnets or insults, Shaw engaged in a big quarrel with the whole world over life. It was not that he was incapable of holding his own at the dinner table; a man who can coin phrases like 'The Seven Deadly Virtues' is a match for any company. It was simply that his own habit of mind was so astringently healthy, so purposeful, and so concerned with morals, that contact with anything so purposeless as an Art for Art's Sake movement was like massaging a corpse; not only unpleasant, but a waste of time. The wit was there, but it was not diseased. And it was not diseased because his mind was clean, as clean as Robert Louis Stevenson's. The sinister slime from Chelsea never oozed as far as Fitzroy Square, and when in '94 Shaw wrote *Candida* and in its Marchbanks drew a portrait of an aesthete, it was an etherealized one. Marchbanks may belong to another world, but that world is certainly not hell, and Shaw's poet is no relation to Dorian Gray. In art, too, Shaw is a rebel, rebelling against rebellion, for even his poet is clean of



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In short, Chesterton's poem might have been addressed to Bernard Shaw instead of to E. C. Bentley, but that the Irishman was middle-aged, for he, too, was gay, unafraid, and unashamed. And since the public insisted on laughing in any event, it was better and healthier that it should laugh at a supremely live red devil in Jaegers than with portentous dead devils with Yellow Books and Green Carnations. In 1895 Shaw helped to send these dead devils packing by writing a commissioned article called *The Sanity of Art*, in which he claimed that Art for Art's Sake was nonsense; and that all art, to be really great, must have a faith and a purpose behind it; and that before any one could paint angels who were really angelic or devils who really terrified, as Fra Angelico and Botticini painted them, it was necessary for him to believe not only in the sacred mission of Art, but also in heaven and hell. No doubt the Art for Art's Sake movement died of its own diseases, but Shaw's pamphlet formally buried the corpse, which, already dead, at last lay down.

In a letter to Ellen Terry, dated May 1897, that is, just a year before he married, Bernie, as she calls him, now past forty, wonders whether he can entice Ellen to come and visit him at Dorking, where he and Sidney and Beatrice Webb are sharing a house to get on with their respective works. (It is to be noted that Miss Payne-Townshend is also there.) Shaw doubts his ability to persuade her as he proceeds to describe 'our eternal political shop; our mornings of dogged writing, all in separate rooms; our ravenous plain meals; our bicycling; the Webbs'

political science; Miss P. T., Irish, shrewd and green-eyed, finding everything "very interesting"; myself always tired and careworn, and always supposed to be "writing to Ellen." You 'd die of it all in three hours, I'm afraid.' Ellen did not appear. No doubt both she and Bernard Shaw felt that their relationship would suffer in some indefinable way if they met. As things were, they wrote to each other for three years continuously, the graph of their correspondence reaching its peak in the middle year, 1897, when they wrote on an average of every three days. In this way, whenever he was tired, Shaw could as it were rest his head on Ellen Terry's lap as Marchbanks rested his on Candida's; only for Shaw it was in imagination and through the post, without fatigue for Ellen or cramp for himself.

Bernard Shaw first mounted that new-fangled Victorian velocipede, the bicycle (what a godsend it was to Punch), on the top of Beachy Head. He was staying in the wooden hotel there with a select party of fellow Fabians, and his efforts set the coast-guards laughing 'as no audience had ever laughed at his plays.' In short, Bernard Shaw lived the outward life of a respectable, middle class, busy professional man, with hobbies and relaxations to suit. No longer the Complete Outsider he had been in the early eighties, he was accepted in the nineties as the Perfect Crank, and a most amusing one. People and clubs (not those in Pall Mall) collected him, and he became a Lion of what in America are called Pink Teas. Having years before, at a meeting of the Shelley Society, declared himself a teetotaller, an atheist, and a vegetarian,

displayed as Public Crank Number One. Thus we find him lecturing to the Women's Progressive Society at the Ideal Club (these names!) on Feminine Meanness, the lecture 'to be followed by an open discussion.' How the ladies must have loved it! Shaw once declared that all men over forty were scoundrels; asked by a lady whether the remark applied to her sex too, he replied that in the case of women the age was thirty. His vegetarianism was no new thing. In 1881 he had given up the 'habit of chewing the dead bodies of animals.' The use of furs for the personal adornment of women is also obnoxious to him. Firing off adjectives like bullets from a machine-gun, he begs one wearer to recognize and forswear fur 'for the nasty, smelling, savage, cruel, thoughtless, bestial thing it is.'

Ever ready to be an 'Ist' or an 'Ite' or an 'Anti' of some sort, Bernard Shaw is an anti-vaccinationist and anti-vivisectionist of the most unpacific type. He objects to vivisection on the familiar Puritan ground that it not only hurts the victim but gives rein to the sadistic impulses of the vivisector. Lust for cruelty is thus permitted by law (though admittedly also controlled by it), and sanctioned by public opinion as being necessary for the attainment of knowledge. No, says Shaw: 'If you cannot attain to knowledge without torturing a dog, you must do without knowledge.'

His objections to vaccination are not complicated so much as numerous. In the first place, not believing in its infallibility he regards it as a superstition, a 'corrupt and mischievous' one, and therefore objects to compulsory vaccination much as a



Moslem would object to compulsory baptism. Then, his natural fastidiousness of person is such that he would in any case demur at the prospect of a hostile army of diseased microbes invading the Shavian blood stream; but when told that the doctor empowered to compel the operation also has a vested interest in it, and that without it and similar operations his income would suffer serious depletion, he recoils violently, and condemns the whole affair as a professional conspiracy as well as a lay superstition. In fact, Bernard Shaw's objection to vaccination, 'dirty, dangerous, and unscientific' in method as he considered it at any rate in 1906, is but part of his much more virulent objection to the profit of the private doctor administering it: that is, to the privateness of the private doctor. And this, of course, is part of his wider hatred of all private things, from poverty downwards. For Bernard Shaw is your true Republican. He loves and lives for the *Res Publica*, or Public Thing, and longs to smash or abolish or municipalize or nationalize the Private Thing wherever he finds it. In the matter of vaccination, incidentally, he can speak with a peculiar kind of freedom, because he himself had smallpox in 1881, and can therefore point to at least one person as being none the worse for it.

Nevertheless, his attitude to these matters troubles at least one of his admirers, and I do not think he can escape scot free. For instance, when he suffered in his eighties from a severe attack of pernicious anaemia, did he or did he not allow himself to be treated and cured with concentrated extract of animal liver? That is the question. For this cure, so I am informed by a responsible medical authority,

would not have been brought to its present state of efficiency so quickly, if at all, had it not been for vivisection experiments, starting with those on hens in 1740 by Menghini and ending with those on dogs in 1920 by Whipple. To put it mildly, then, Bernard Shaw's survival depended not only on the sufferings of animals, but also on the eating of meat in its most concentrated form. We talk about people who want to have their cake and eat it: Shaw goes one better by eating the very cake which he has persistently rejected as being unfit for human consumption. How dare he reject his cake and eat it? He might answer that a logical person cannot live in an illogical world without practising some of its illogicalities, and that a man is no more justified in refusing to save his life because the means to save it has been derived from vivisectioned animals than in going about shirtless because the button-sewing industry was shockingly underpaid. But the answer is, that martyrs to Christian Science, for example, frequently die for their faith, or rather for their lack of it, and that if one deals with an employer who treats his workers badly one changes to an employer who treats them well. But I think that Shaw would be more likely to answer, that though he took his liver extract like a bad old boy and lived, the world would be a better place had there been no vivisection, no extract of liver, and he had died; for at his age he was quite ready to go the way of all flesh, and indeed would have been, like the majority of the patients in the care of his famous creation, Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington, 'better dead.' In any case, until he proves himself a martyr to some of his convictions, I fear that the

world will not pay as much attention to his opinions as he would wish.

Halving Shaw's present age and returning to the nineties, we see a spare, vigorous figure approaching what is called the prime of life. Garbed in some new hygienic wool, he strides or cycles about the Surrey hills on the white motorless roads. From his beard, his hobby, and the impression he gives of always being busy, an irreverent onlooker might well have named him the Bicycling Beaver. Ever industrious, ever anxious to be in the vanguard of the New, he seems fearful of being left behind. The following glimpse he gives of his room in Fitzroy Square in 1897 is of a factory working overtime on the re-manufacture of ideas. 'Whilst I am dressing and undressing I do all my reading. The book lies open on the table. I never shut it, but put the next book on top of it long before it's finished. After some months there is a mountain of buried books, all wide open, so that all my library is distinguished by a page with the stain of a quarter's dust or soot on it.' The impression is not one of restlessness but urgency, as though the spinning of the earth was something he ought to try to keep up with; and when seen in the London streets or on the Malvern hills he always walks as though he had an appointment with himself and might be late for it.

With no dependants and few intimacies, Bernard Shaw's cares have been few, as this world goes. Where some people love persons and other people things, Shaw loves ideas. Outside that cold realm where all is intellect and theory and sublimation he has no passionate attachments. Therefore he has



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always been difficult to capture, to corner, to pin down. He did not fall into the snares most men find along their path, because, like a sprite, he was always in the air above them with his feet well off the ground. Humanity's common denominator was not common to him, and he declined to be one of its multiples. One of his first journalistic stunts, for instance, was to found a Society for the Abolition of Christmas. Again, when asked to attend the celebrations at Stratford-upon-Avon in honour of Shakespeare's birthday, he replied that he had no intention of honouring Shakespeare's birthday seeing that he did not honour his own.

This lack of common touch with humanity is the saddest thing about Bernard Shaw; for it lays the withering hand of a great sterility upon his work. He cannot touch people; cannot move them, either to action or even to tears. Though his sole interest is the progress of humanity towards godhead, he is never quite at home with humanity's human beings. Thus in early middle age he was a lone man, which is not the same thing as being alone. The early gaucheries had long since disappeared, and he had successfully fortified his shyness, but there remained, as he tells us, 'a deeper strangeness which has made me feel all my life a sojourner on this planet rather than a native of it.' As a sojourner, he was determined to travel light and quickly. To him traditions were things to break with because they held him back, roots things to pull up because they held him down. This feeling of being a sojourner made him, and has kept him, unsocial in the sense that he is nothing of a clubman. He will go readily to a club provided it

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be a debating club, for then there is work to do and truth to be expounded; but he is constitutionally incapable of going to a club to relax, or do nothing, or mix with his fellows; and doctrinally incapable of going there to drink with them. Thus his membership of the Royal Automobile Club has nothing to do with its members: he went there to swim. Likewise when an acquaintance said he was going to the Authors' Club, it was the unsocial aloofness of the sojourner as well as ironic wit that made Shaw ask: 'Any authors there?' Similarly, he will go to the Savoy, say, but only to propose the health of an Einstein in a brilliant speech.

Kindly and conscientious, shy, arid, and aloof, Shaw had no bosom friends, none with whom he could rub shoulders on terms of equality, none with whom he wanted to make the welkin ring. He knew too many people, and too many kinds of people, to be intimate with any. He could jog them or argue with them, dazzle, amuse, irritate or shock them, but he could never mix with them. Oscar Wilde perceived this, and put Bernard Shaw once for all a little apart from other men when he drily said of him: 'An excellent man: he has no enemies: and none of his friends likes him.'

Work, that sovereign remedy, filled the gaps left empty by Bernard Shaw's avoidance of the common pleasures and social habits of more worldly men. Work is a habit, and Shaw has never grown out of it. Now when a teetotal and ascetically unworldly man gets the habit of work badly, taking to it as a consolation until ultimately it becomes a drug, one

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down, or he marries. Bernard Shaw did both, and in that order. No man, not even Shaw, can live for long on a bloodless diet of ideas and intellect and work accompanied by a three-year course of love by correspondence, such as Shaw's with Ellen Terry, without excessive strain. When would the fellow's feet touch earth? It was impossible to fall in love with him, according to Mrs Sidney Webb: for, as she said, 'You cannot fall in love with a sprite; and Shaw is a sprite in such matters, not a real person.' The object of discussion was the first to agree. 'It is certainly true,' he replied. 'I am fond of women (or one in a thousand, say): but I am in earnest about quite other things.' Shrewd and green-eyed Miss Payne-Townshend thought differently, and managed to bring the sprite to earth in her own way; though not without the sprite's conscious co-operation. Two years previously, in 1896, Shaw had written to Ellen Terry concerning the lady Fabian, stating that he proposed to 'refresh his heart by falling in love with her.' So came about the marriage with the bridegroom on crutches. He was on crutches because the overwork and the breakdown came first. The indefatigable fellow, living chiefly on his nerves, had made such demands on his system that it was unable to withstand a trifling injury caused by a too tightly laced shoe, with the result that an abscess developed, involving two operations which kept him on crutches for eighteen months.

Figuratively speaking, Shaw had exhausted himself in making his bed. Now, convalescent, with a position and a reputation, and with money from *The Devil's Disciple* to pay his way, he was content



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to lie on it and to ask a wife to share it. Accordingly, in May 1898, Bernard Shaw resigned from the *Saturday Review*, and on the first of June following, amid the first rumblings of the Boers in South Africa and two months before Bismarck's death, Mr and Mrs Shaw led each other home from the registrar's. Past their first youth, they knew what they wanted from marriage: not a paradise of romance, but friendship, companionship, and the bond of common interests. They made a remarkably sensible couple.

## CHAPTER VI

### HUNTING THE SHAW

THE first time I met Bernard Shaw was in 1928. I had just made arrangements with him and the New York Theatre Guild to present a repertoire of his plays across Canada each season, and had come to London to shake hands with him on the pact. I had been in Canada to settle the details of the first trans-continental tour, and the voyage home had been memorable for me, because we had passed through a field of icebergs and I had never seen an iceberg before. My appointment with the great man was rather an early one, and to have my wits about me when the time came I had bestirred myself betimes and gone to plunge into the stately swimming-pool at the Royal Automobile Club before breakfast. At that time of day the pool is dim and comparatively deserted. Still half asleep and still feeling the motion of the ship, I approached the water and was about to plunge when something made me stop. I rubbed my eyes. There, right in the middle of the pool floated a diminutive iceberg. Impossible! I rubbed my eyes again, recalling the extremely sober way in which I had spent the previous evening. It was still there. Then, standing no nonsense, I peered more intently across the darkish water and finally perceived, of course, that my iceberg was nothing else than Bernard Shaw's white beard, upturned and glistening even in that early morning gloom, the creature's remaining nine-tenths being

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submerged in the proper iceberg way. I watched not seeming to. The observed of all observers seemed happy to be off duty, relieved at the absence of an audience. Slowly and easily he swam to the side and took out of the water the spare upright body which had served him then for seventy-two years, and placed it carefully on dry land. Then it was that I began to perceive something of the meticulous method, the instinctive reasoning, which attaches even to his most ordinary and casual actions. He did not go at once to his cubicle. Instead, it was as if he were saying: 'Why wet my very small cubicle more than I need; what are hands for; why not combine the process of drying with the performance of one's daily dozen?' This may sound like a case of finding in Shaw only what we bring to him pushed to an absurd extreme, but the fact remains that there he stood towel-less, brushing and flicking the water from his limbs methodically, symmetrically, and even artistically, first from his ankles, bending down to reach them, then from his calves, and so upwards from thighs, body, arms, beard, ending, if I remember rightly, with a final flick to his eyebrows. Then he retired from view.

Even so, I do not know Bernard Shaw particularly well. That is to say, I am not in his confidence. But I do not think this necessarily a disadvantage. Indeed, it may be all to the good, for I see no reason why even Bernard Shaw should know Bernard Shaw particularly well. He is too close to him, too used to him, to see him objectively. Though Shaw's eyesight has always been phenomenally good; so good, indeed, that when an



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ophthalmic surgeon tested his eyes he told Shaw that he was of no professional interest to him whatsoever, because his eyesight, unlike that of ninety per cent of the population, was perfectly normal; yet even perfect eyes cannot look into themselves. And so, if in spite of this we still want to play at Hunt the Shaw and run our quarry to earth, a metaphor, by the way, not at all to the Shavian taste, we had better assume, as in other cases, that the works proclaim the man. Then the procedure is clear: see his plays and films, and read his prefaces and books. The box offices and the bookshops are open, both of them willing to take your money. Here, of course, the hunter encounters those difficulties of time and money mentioned at the beginning of this book. All hunting is an expensive pastime demanding leisure, and Hunting the Shaw, in wide country where the trails are many and the scents cross, is no exception. All we can do by way of help is to erect some warning signs, and put arrows of direction on some of the trees in the jungle of Shaviana.

In the first place, do not let us look for the whole of the real Shaw in any single character of his plays, but rather for fragments or flashes of him in almost every character. 'As a dramatist,' he tells us, 'I have no clue to any historical or other personage save that part of him which is also myself.' And he adds: 'The man who writes about himself and his own time is the only man who writes about all people and about all time.' If you come across a character who seems to fit Bernard Shaw like a glove, be wary of your find. For instance, you might think you had spotted Shaw in Larry Doyle

of John Bull's Other Island. What simpler? Irish, the son of a small land-agent, Larry was discontented in Ireland: so was Shaw. Larry went to England and made a success there: so did Shaw. In fact, the likeness is so true, as far as it goes, that when Shaw describes Larry in the preface to the play as possessing 'the freedom from illusion, the power of facing facts, the nervous industry, the sharpened wits, the sensitive pride of the imaginative man who has fought his way up through social persecution and poverty,' unbeknown to the reader I took the liberty of lifting the description bodily from Larry Doyle and applied it to Bernard Shaw in the second chapter, recognizing in it an authentic piece of self-portraiture. But if Shaw is Larry Doyle, who is Peter Keegan? For Keegan and Larry are always at loggerheads, yet without a shadow of doubt Father Keegan is many times the mouthpiece of the real Shaw. Shaw, for example, has no use for cut flowers, and we find Peter Keegan admonishing Nora: 'Don't pluck that little flower: if it was a baby you wouldn't want to pull its head off and stick it in a vase of water to look at.' Remember, too, that Keegan talks more than any one else at the end of the play and bows himself out with the last word of the argument; a Shavian life habit.

In the gallery of Shaw's characters Keegan stands a little apart from the others. What distinguishes him from them? The possession of a heart, I think. Of all the Shavian creations this one-time priest, unfrocked for being a little too wise for the liking of those about him, seems the one most capable of human feeling. His heart is warm and

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his sympathies wide. He is perhaps Shaw's noblest creation; certainly his most lovable. It almost seems as if Ireland, on which Shaw had turned his back so finally and curtly more than a quarter of a century before, was not to be denied after all. There is a nostalgia in Keegan, and all the tenderness we miss in Shaw wells up in him. If Shaw seems to lack roots, or love of his native land, or simplicity, or warmth, one likes to believe that it is not so much that he is a stranger to these things, as that he has given them into Father Keegan's keeping, because he feels they will bloom more sweetly in the Land of the Saints. Keegan is a dream of what Shaw would wish to have been if he had remained in Ireland. If Shaw answered that in that event the dream would be a nightmare, he would provide one more proof that his heart will always escape us unless we look for it in Peter Keegan's bosom.

Just as the more superficial points of a Larry Doyle may prove false scents, so, conversely, our quarry may be tracked sometimes to the most unexpected lairs. For instance, who would expect to find the real Shaw speaking through the mouth of Don Juan? Yet in Man and Superman he does so at some length, and the sensuous lips of the sixteenth-century libertine utter fervent expositions of Bernard Shaw's philosophical convictions. For instance: 'My brain labours at a knowledge which does nothing for me personally but make my body bitter to me and my decay and death a calamity. Were I not possessed with a purpose beyond my own, I had better be a ploughman than a philosopher; for the ploughman lives as long as the



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philosopher, eats more, sleeps better, and rejoices in the wife of his bosom with less misgiving.' Again: 'I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life.' These two passages form part of a conversation occupying more than forty pages of small print, although it may be said in extenuation that the scene takes place in hell, where time, as we know it, is non-existent. All the same, Don Juan surely must have needed a little time in which to cool his passions and acquire his Shavian intellectuality. Whether such dialogue is dramatic, or such scenes drama, is of course a matter of opinion. Personally, I am satisfied with a very easy test: I go and count the box-office receipts. If Shaw had had to go the rounds of the commercial managers with his cap in one hand and the Hell Scene in the other, expecting them to produce it, they would have told him that no audience would stand for it, because, like Polonius's beard, it was too long: but they would have left out Polonius's beard. Actually, audiences do stand for it. They do so partly, no doubt, for the fascination that any feat of sheer endurance holds for the spectator, such as pole-squatting or hunger-striking. But whatever the reasons, it is a fact that whenever the Hell Scene is included in *Man and Superman* the box-office takings increase appreciably. I therefore declare it drama. It is a music drama for four voices; tenor, soprano, baritone, and bass.

Shaw has never been anxious to avoid long speeches in his plays: on the contrary, he feels

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that they keep his plays in the classical tradition of Sophocles and Molière and Shakespeare. Besides, he can write them superlatively well. When Saint Joan was first produced in New York in 1923, some months before its production in London, the Theatre Guild, anxious to establish its success, cabled asking Shaw to alter the play so that the curtain could fall in time for the suburban commuters to catch their last trains home. Shaw, convinced that length, as such, all else being equal, was a virtue in a play rather than a disadvantage, promptly cabled back: 'Alter the trains!'

But to return to Hunt the Shaw. Here is another tip. Watch carefully any character in the plays considered mad by the other characters. More than likely the real Shaw is lurking in the very words that caused their speaker to be called mad. We shall find the word mad applied to any one who drops bombs of shattering common-sense into situations made supposedly bombproof by a blind observance of the social conventions. The epithet is also applied equally to any one who, in suggesting a remedy, thinks only of the benefit of its result instead of the propriety of its application; and to any one who, perceiving an unpalatable truth, speaks it out, instead of tucking it away behind his old school tie and pretending it isn't there. Such people society simply cannot afford to recognize as sane. Common-sense and truth are among the first awkward things to be smothered in the layers of cotton-wool in which man has become wrapped so comfortably; so that the average person, suddenly compelled to face these strangers, finds that he cannot look them in the

eye, and so denies them. In short, the truth-monger must be called mad lest he embarrass society, and the man foolish enough to act on his truthmongering must be put away ruthlessly lest he wreck society.

This being so, and as all Shaw's important plays are concerned with truthmongers and their activities, the number of people in them called mad is not surprising. To begin with, there is Joan. Because she would not deny the truth that came to her, through her Voices she embarrassed society, and because she acted on that truth with startling effect she was duly put out of society's way. Shaw sees to it, therefore, that she is called mad by nearly every important person in his play.) In John Bull's Other Island it is of course Peter Keegan whose wisdom is called madness, and the villagers, the better to withstand the force of that wisdom, confirm their opinion by building up legends of his craziness, until the defeated saint, thrown back for company on beasts and birds, flowers and grasshoppers, sometimes wonders whether the villagers are not right after all. In the same play even Tom Broadbent, the jolly, steam-rolling Englishman with no nonsense about him, is thought by Larry Doyle's father to be 'not quite right in his head,' because he wants to introduce a little hygienic comfort into the pig-littered village that was good enough for old Doyle and his father before him. In *Candida*, an epic of home-truth-telling, four of the six characters are called mad in the course of the play; while in the play about *The Unexpected Isles* the person who most surely escapes liquidation on the Day of Judgment is its



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hero, and he is appropriately called The Simpleton. (Probably Shaw's own attitude towards these pet madmen of his is best summed up in Saint Joan when de Poulengey, urging that the Maid be sent to the Dauphin, exclaims: 'We want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us!')

Another tip. Not infrequently a Shaw play contains a character who fulfils the function of a Greek Chorus, by commenting on the action; and, since the play is by Shaw, upon a number of other things as well. This character is generally old enough to have retired from the hurly-burly of life, and therefore plays a minor part in the play, although sometimes, as in the case of Captain Shotover in Heartbreak House, it is the centre piece. The one I am thinking of at the moment is Sir Patrick Cullen in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Retired from medical practice years before the curtain rises, Paddy Cullen can leave the consumptive rascal-artist Dubedat in his colleagues' hands, and sit back, full of wise saws and ancient instances, echoing Shaw. In a later chapter I hope we shall become acquainted with the Shavian view of punishment and criminals and with the Shavian amendments to the criminal law; but any one with the barest knowledge of these will recognize that Paddy speaks with his master's voice in the following dialogue. He is trying to dissuade 'B. B.' from considering any idea of handing Dubedat over to the police for bigamy.

B. B. But is he to be allowed to defy the criminal law of the land?

SIR PATRICK. The criminal law is no use to decent people. It only helps blackguards to blackmail their

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families. What are we family doctors doing half our time but conspiring with the family solicitors to keep some rascal out of jail and some family out of disgrace?

B. B. But at least it will punish him.

SIR PATRICK. Oh, yes: itll punish him. Itll punish not only him but everybody connected with him, innocent and guilty alike. Itll throw his board and lodging on our rates and taxes for a couple of years, and then turn him loose on us a more dangerous blackguard than ever. Itll put the girl in prison and ruin her: itll lay his wife's life waste. You may put the criminal law out of your head once for all: it's only fit for fools and savages.

Again, when a few days later Louis Dubedat dies on the stage of galloping consumption, and the ineffable 'B. B.,' brimming over with emotion, proceeds to misquote Shakespeare over his dead body, Sir Patrick cuts him short by saying: 'When youre as old as I am, youll know that it matters very little how a man dies. What matters is, how he lives. Every fool that runs his nose against a bullet is a hero nowadays, because he dies for his country. Why dont he live for it to some purpose?' That is pure Shaw. In its passion for life and purpose, in its absence of heroics and flim-flam, it is Shaw at his best and shortest.

When people arraign Bernard Shaw for lack of patriotism they should be referred to that remarkable passage. If they find no patriotism in it, then their patriotism is not Shaw's. For his is there, sure enough, but it is of a kind so rare as almost to require a different name. It is a patriotism that must be strong enough to operate without the help of flags or banners or the blare of bands. On the three hundred and sixty-four dull, prosaic

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days, when the drums and fifes are stored away and the kings keep within doors, it must continue active and pulsating in the hearts of men. The drudgery of it, the thankless, difficult, ceaseless drudgery! The tragedy of the twentieth century so far is, that only in times of war or rumours of war do men feel themselves members one of another. War uncovers a purpose and reveals a comradeship; but Peace hides her meaning, and we go about like strangers. If only we could invest our black hats and white collars with some of the magic we used to find in khaki! For Peace, too, hath her fights and her patriotisms; and none has fought longer or more tenaciously against those ancient enemies, poverty and ignorance, than Bernard Shaw. These are universal enemies knowing no boundaries. Shaw's sympathies, therefore, cold but not calculating, intellectual but not academic, overflow mere geographical frontiers, and in times of war between nations they are apt to embrace the opposite side as well, because he has the gift, fatal in a fight, for seeing the other fellow's point of view. To any narrower sympathy, any lesser understanding, or to mere tribal patriotism he will not willingly stoop. He revolts so strongly, indeed, from the cry of 'My country, right or wrong!' that many hear in his reproaches only the worse cry of 'My enemy's country, right or wrong!' When Edith Cavell was about to be shot, she spoke out to the world, and said: 'Patriotism is not enough.' Bernard Shaw knew what she meant. So did all of us. That is why we pretended not to hear. It was the least noble kind of patriotism that led to the omission of these



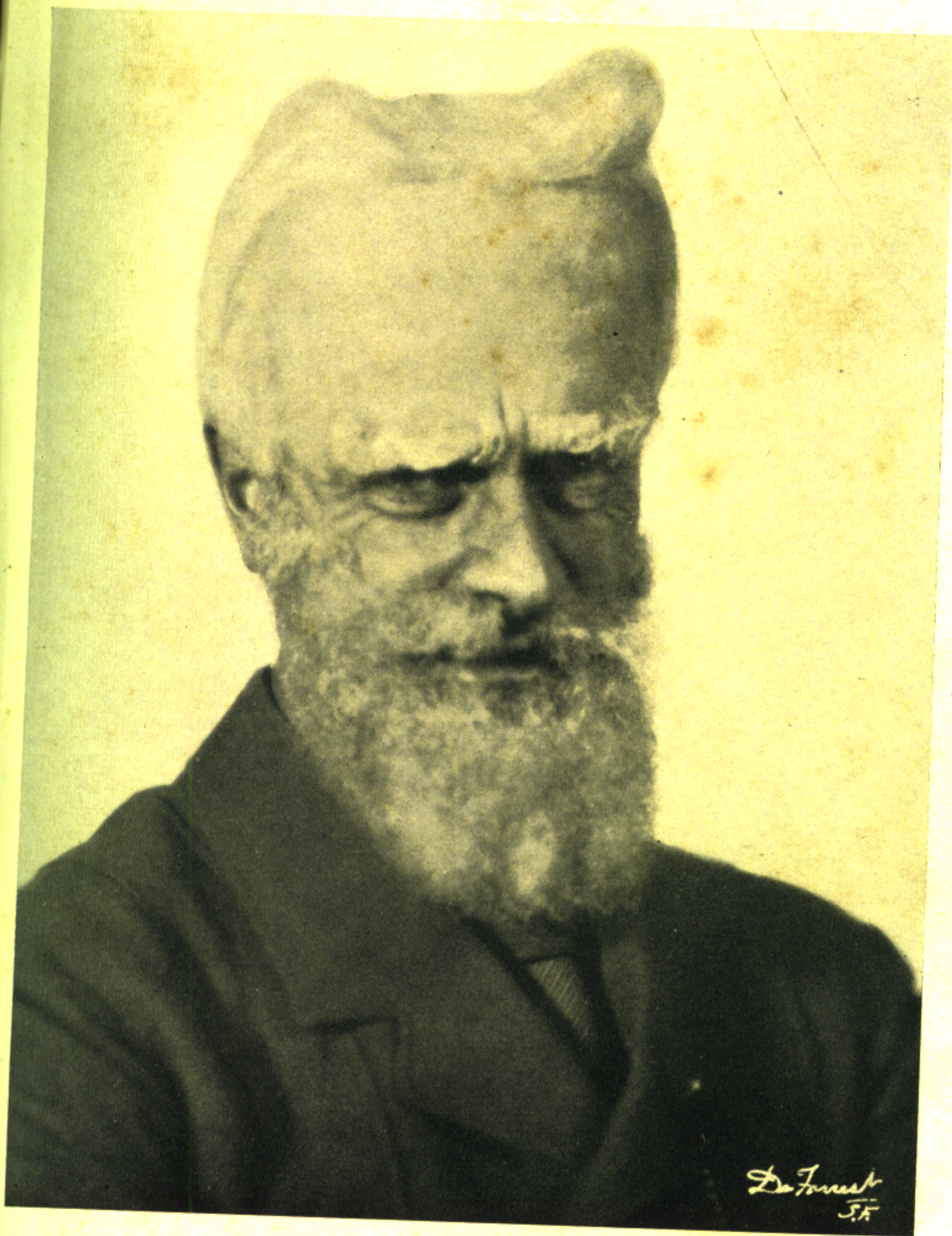
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flaming words from her statue in London outside St Martin-in-the-Fields church; and justly, witheringly, Shaw thundered: 'For which omission, and the lie it implies, her countrymen will need Edith's intercession when they are themselves brought to judgment, if any heavenly power thinks such moral cowards capable of pleading to an intelligible indictment.'

I do not wish to imply that there is necessarily a Paddy Cullen in all the plays. By no means. These tips must be taken with wary circumspection. For instance, in *Too True To Be Good*, there is an old geyser called The Elder who seems to spout the real Shaw every other time he opens his mouth. I once put the matter to a very practical test under the following circumstances.

My Guernseyman partner, Barry Jones, and I were committed to present *Too True To Be Good* across Canada before we ever saw the play. When we did see it we decided that it was Shaw at his worst, which is about the same as other playwrights at their best. However, being supremely confident of our ability to better the work of the world's greatest living dramatist, we accepted the situation (as indeed we were bound to do by contract), and racked our brains how to counteract in our own production the poor reputation the play had gained both in London and New York, and which, unless we took drastic measures, would precede it across Canada. It was clear to us that it was the last act, the act in which The Elder appeared, which was chiefly responsible for the play's comparative failure. Obviously, then, something had to be done about The Elder. It was at





*Maurice Colbourne as The Elder in Too True to be Good*







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this point that I suddenly recalled an afternoon which I had spent in Minneapolis two years before, in 1930. I was in a broadcasting studio in my professional capacity of Theatre Guild Lecturer on Bernard Shaw (and other matters), when the radio was suddenly switched on, and to my intense pleasure I heard, coming all the way from the Savoy Hotel in London, England, that rich, Irish, musical voice with the twinkle in the tongue, proposing Einstein's health in one of the finest speeches I have ever heard in my life. Two years later I had forgotten all the details of the speech (except the bit about Einstein having confirmed by science what Hogarth had divined as an artist: namely, that 'the line of Nature is a curve'), but I remembered the gist of it sufficiently to realize that the things Shaw had talked about at the Savoy were precisely the things The Elder talked about in the play, equally brilliantly and at roughly equal length. As an argument between Kneller, the painter, and Newton, the philosopher, they were later to form one of the topics of In Good King Charles's Golden Days, but naturally I did not know this at the time. The Elder therefore seemed to me none other than Bernard Shaw himself! It was true that none of the other characters called The Elder mad, but we discounted this omission by pointing out to each other that his madness was too obvious to be worth mentioning, since the perfectly respectable twentieth-century old gentleman lived in a cave and wore strange clothes. So I, who for my sins, was due to play the part, took a new lease of life, and plucking up courage dressed The Elder in a suit.

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cycling suit of Norfolk pattern and 1900 fashion, surmounting it with suitable whiskers and a manufactured nobility of forehead. Only the ears defeated me. But even this madcap contriving failed to save the play, and one can only say that Shaw's presence on the stage by proxy, so to speak, caused us less pecuniary loss than we would have sustained without him. It was worth it, however: especially in one city, whose most eminent critic, once in a theatre, was apt to nod. The applause which greeted the appearance of 'Bernard Shaw' roused this amiable fellow from a deep slumber, and he nearly had a fit. The knowledge that Bernard Shaw was at that precise moment at sea on a world cruise galvanized him into one livid moment of agonized life, and then he gave it up. He shut his eyes quickly, darkly murmuring something about having got 'em again, and returned to his slumbers undisturbed: where we will leave him. We had played *Too True To Be Good* in San Francisco, and when the S.S. *Empress of Britain* a few weeks later put into that port with Mr and Mrs Bernard Shaw on board, one of the swarm of reporters confronted Shaw with a photograph of his impersonator. G. B. S., I am happy to say, took the matter in good part, and even went so far as to pay me a great Shavian compliment by telling the reporter that I was 'mad as a hatter.' At the same time he made it clear that he was no more The Elder than he was any of his other characters.

Hunting for Shaw in the plays is a difficult pastime. The results are uncertain, and many a time the snark fades into a boojum. For this

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'reasonable, patient, consistent, apologetic, laborious person, with the temperament of a schoolmaster and the pursuits of a vestryman' (as Shaw once described himself) possesses a divinatory power so piercing, an intellectual grasp so embracing, an understanding of his characters so sensitive, that in an argument he endows all of them impartially with equal strength. In this way, a keen sense of fairness runs through all his plays. When a character is speaking, Shaw, for the dramatic moment, is that character. That is to say, when he is writing words for his puppets to utter he gives each of them in turn one hundred per cent support, and their words and actions are those which he himself would want to say and do if he actually were those people in precisely their circumstances. At such moments the preacher and the artist and the debater are one. As a young man he used frequently to say things contrary to his real opinion, and apparently with the utmost conviction, simply to draw other people out and see what they would say. 'It develops one's muscles. Besides, one learns from it: a man never tells you anything until you contradict him.'

When people complain that Shaw mystifies them because they can never make out what he is driving at, I think it is this bewildering fair play of his that baffles them. When a round dozen of his characters expound divergent views and expound them so ably that each in turn seems unanswerably right, it is a little difficult to know which view, if any, is the author's. The only conclusion which people feel safe in coming to, is that  $0=0$ . In *Getting Married*, for instance, which is nothing



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but a complicated non-stop debate in dramatic form, the various views of marriage are put forward so forcibly that they seem to cancel each other out, the monogamist winning at one moment, the apostle of free love at another, and so on. Similarly in John Bull's Other Island, Liberal and Conservative toss political views back and forth and end with honours even. I remember a performance of this play when the Royal Box was the scene of an uproarious disturbance, in the sense that the uproarious delight of the Liberal Lieutenant-Governor and the Conservative Prime Minister who sat in it was literally disturbing. 'How do you like *that*?' His Honour would chuckle as Tom Broadbent hit a Liberal nail on the head. 'No more than you like *that*!' the Prime Minister would counter, nudging His Honour as another character on the stage drove home a Conservative nail: until these two, enjoying themselves hugely, ended by treating the scene as a ding-dong match of politics for which they were keeping the score. This, as in so many of the plays, turned out to be fifty-fifty.

The difficulty arising from Shaw's Olympian fair-mindedness disappears when we leave the Plays for the Prefaces. In these, a quarter of a million words long, the real Shaw reveals himself to those with the patience to seek him. There, free of censors, managers, actors, plots, and all the other limitations of the stage, he preaches before the world's bar sermons that may be described as sustained paroxysms of special pleading.

Besides reading the Prefaces, the really con-

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scientific seeker after Shaw would have to walk abroad a little. Not far: but certainly as far as Kensington, whose respectability and imperviousness to anything new is well calculated to foster rebellion in the breasts of its less somnolent inhabitants. And also as far as St Pancras, whose dingy purlieus, still dingier in the nineties, are a standing challenge to all healthy-minded citizens to abolish, not only them, but their inhabitants and the kind of civilization that made them possible, for ever; for if the searcher does not get more from poking his or her nose into a slum than from all the *Das Kapitals* and *Blue Books* ever printed, then for that person Bernard Shaw will always remain a closed book.

Then, too, even the smallest library of the Shavian student should contain at least the Bible, Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Shelley. And to these I would suggest the addition of Samuel Butler, whom Shaw describes as 'in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century.' Butler's influence on Shaw is incalculable. It was not so much that Butler influenced Shaw's mind or opinions, as that he helped him, by example, to look at those opinions in a particular kind of way. He did not reveal life to Shaw, but Shaw liked the kind of glasses through which Butler looked at life. In sounding the charge for a fresh attack on society, Butler managed to sound a new note. In both him and Shaw the pursuit of knowledge by the method of combining scientific inquiry with natural intuition led to the heterodox conclusions of the born rebel; and if any one were invited to stand as literary

godfather to Bernard Shaw, probably no one could find less excuse for refusing the honour than the author of *Erewhon* and *The Way of All Flesh*. The mantle of the elder rebel fell easily on to the shoulders of the younger. There was a close kinship of spirit between the two men. Both were Victorian rebels, both professed a philosophy of life, both were imbued with curiosity and the spirit of scientific inquiry, and both were intensely musical.



## CHAPTER VII

### IS BERNARD SHAW CONCEITED?

THERE are many questions about Bernard Shaw which still set people by the ears and split them into opposing camps. Is Bernard Shaw conceited? Has Bernard Shaw changed? Is Bernard Shaw serious? These are typical questions, and that they are still burning questions is a measure of Shaw's failure to convince, and a proof that he is for ever defeating himself. For although he has been answering all such questions assiduously since before the twentieth century began, the public is still asking them, and when it tries to answer them the answers are almost invariably wrong.

Those who do not know Bernard Shaw do not bother even to ask the first question. They take it for granted that he is conceited, abnormally and appallingly so. But it is a question well worth asking, and for myself I would answer that while Shaw has a very fine conceit of the importance of his work, and of himself as the instrument for getting that work done, he is personally not in the least conceited. Incidentally, would not a man of his mental and literary powers be outstandingly a fool if he held a poor opinion of himself, and outstandingly a humbug if he pretended to hold that opinion? If Shaw's impartial opinion of Shaw is a healthy one, and he voices it, thereby offending the canons of gentlemanly conduct, he cannot help it; he would rather be ungentlemanly than a mock-

artist can be a gentleman, adding, of course, that Bernard Shaw is an artist. 'I leave the delicacies of retirement to those who are gentlemen first and literary workmen afterwards. The cart and trumpet for me.'

Before going further let us try to clear up this gentleman business; otherwise it will be in the way continually. Let it be said at once, then, that Bernard Shaw is a gentleman. And none of his brilliant attempts to prove the contrary succeeds. Gentleman can be given a hundred different meanings, according to taste and political prejudice, but everybody knows what it means. Shaw is not only a gentleman in the sense that he was born and bred one, but he is also a gentleman in the sense that he has good manners and fine feeling. King Charles the Second, asked what was the mark of a gentleman, replied: 'To be easy oneself, and to make others easy too.' Shaw fulfils this inspired definition admirably, and with all the more credit since his natural shyness tends to make his ease a trifle conscious. But Shaw is a gentleman in the far deeper sense of being quite literally a gentleman. Gentle to the depths of his being because he hates cruelty to any living thing, he is ferociously ungentle only when other people are ferociously cruel. But none of these definitions suit Shaw when he himself uses the word gentleman, though they remain valid for all that. Instead, he twists the word to his own purposes, and makes it fit his special pleadings. Thus he defines a gentleman as 'one who has money enough to do what every fool would do if he could afford it: that is, consume without producing.' Or again: 'He who believes





*Photographers' quarry*

KEYSTONE





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in education, criminal law, and sport, needs only property to make him a perfect modern gentleman.' General Burgoyne in *The Devil's Disciple* is a gentleman because, as Shaw puts it, 'he pleads all through for softening and easing the trials by reciprocal politeness and consideration between all the parties, and for ignoring the villainy of his gallows, the unworthiness of his cause, and the murderousness of his profession. The picture is completed by the band playing Handel's music, and the Christian clergyman reading the Bible to give the strangling an air of being an impressive ceremony.' This passage suggested to me a further definition of a gentleman in the Shavian sense: A gentleman is a man who is at home and happy in society because he has taken its evils for granted for so long that they appear to him as virtues. In other words, Shaw applies the word to people who do things of which he disapproves. In that case he is sometimes a gentleman, in the Shavian sense, himself.

Reverting to the question of his conceit, consider his position at the outset of his career. He comes to a strange country; he is penniless; his outlook is a cross between that of a dynamiter and a missionary; he has his bread and butter to earn; his name to make; and a point of view which he honestly thinks should be heard. Remembering the early fate of his novels, how should he proceed? For he was determined, as we know, not to spend his life in providing fodder for mice if he could help it. The answer need surprise no one accustomed to twentieth-century methods. He decided to do what every successful person does to-day, and to

a large extent is compelled to do: advertise. Having no money to advertise his wares, he could only capitalize himself. Accordingly, in cold business blood, the man Bernard Shaw engaged the wit Bernard Shaw to advertise Bernard Shaw the philosopher and preacher. That the wit rather enjoyed the job only made the engagement a shrewder stroke of business. Shaw has packed these considerations into the following remarks. 'In England as elsewhere the spontaneous recognition of really original work begins with a mere handful of people, and propagates itself so slowly that it has become a commonplace to say that genius, demanding bread, is given a stone after its possessor's death. The remedy for this is sedulous advertisement. Accordingly, I have advertised myself so well that I find myself, whilst still in middle life, almost as legendary as the Flying Dutchman.'

Bernard Shaw's success as a salesman argues not conceit so much as instinctive wisdom in his choice of policy, and an impish courage, that no doubt he enjoyed displaying, in carrying it out. Is the manufacturer conceited because he tells you that his soaps, or cigarettes, or razors, or whatnots are positively the best and that no home is complete without them? Do we think him puffed up because he spends large sums each year in blowing his own trumpet? Do we find him insufferable because he dins into us the superlative qualities of his goods from hoardings in all colours and sizes of screaming print? Of course not. If we object to him it is because he defaces the countryside, not because he is conceited. We congratulate him, rather, and in England if he is successful enough



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the king makes him a peer of the realm. It does not seem fair to tolerate the manufacturer and condemn the philosopher. Both have goods to sell; the only problem is how best to sell them. Thus Shaw, in realizing the value of advertisement, only anticipated the approved ways of modern business. Even so he strenuously denies that he has ever had time to practise what he preaches in this respect, and declares that half his work is unknown to the public for lack of advertisement. It might be thought that what he had been unable to achieve for himself the films would achieve for him. For there is no doubt that the brilliantly successful film of *Pygmalion* brought him a vast new public overnight. Unfortunately, however, the real Shaw and the message he cares so much about will remain hidden from this new public just as it has always remained hidden from the old; for the public, old or new, great or small, gets from his plays only what it brings to them: that is, laughter and entertainment. The wider his public becomes through the filming of his plays, the greater will grow the reputation not of Bernard Shaw but of his *alter ego*, Joey the Clown, whom we shall meet again.

Still, any publicity is better than no publicity, and there is no doubt that practice made Shaw well-nigh perfect at the game. He could charm publicity out of an egg-shell. His beard, his diet, catching cold, moving house, the tailoring of his coat, nothing is too trivial to be grist to his mill. The very brickbats thrown at him he acknowledges gratefully, because if they fly near enough to be caught, he can barb them with wit and throw them back at his assailants. Thus when someone calls

him an 'ignorant ass,' Shaw neither passes the insult by, nor grows indignant at it. Instead, he blandly owns the soft impeachment, taking care at the same time to associate himself with some great man and the ass with merit, like this: 'Sir Isaac Newton confessed himself an ignorant man; and although I know everything he knew, and a good deal more besides, yet relatively—*relatively*, mind—I am almost as ignorant as he. The term "ass" I take to be a compliment. Modesty, hard work, contentment with plain fare, development of the ear, underestimation by the public, all these are the lot of the ass and the last of the Bassetts.' How delightful! The method, of course, is the jiu-jitsu one of giving in the direction the opponent presses, of disablement by agreement. It is great fun.

When invited to become a vice-president of some society or other, Bernard Shaw retorted that he was never vice-president of anything, and that if he were he would be vice-president of the universe. In the same disarming vein he has styled himself 'a sort of unofficial Bishop of Everywhere.' How is it that we have come to tolerate this kind of thing, this superb arrogance, until if the truth were confessed we rather enjoy it? Well, in the first place Shaw is without competitors for the bishopric of Everywhere. Since Carlyle there have been no applicants for the post of Sage to England. When Shaw arrived the post was going begging. Having accepted it, with none to say him nay, the habitual thoroughness of the man made a thoroughness of the job; and whereas Carlyle was known only as the Sage of Chelsea, Shaw never lets himself be known as the Sage of Whitehall, or Hertfordshire,

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but always insists, as in his broadcast from Australia, that he is 'speaking to the universe.' England has never been rich in sages or prophets; and when one appears in her midst she is rather flattered, and is inclined to encourage him to behave as he pleases, within limits, like the Giant Panda at the Zoo.

The other point in Shaw's favour is that he is an Irishman; for the English would never dream of allowing an Englishman to talk to them the way Shaw does, alternately blackguarding them and treating them as children to be led by the nose for their own good. The truth is, that Englishmen are not without fame and honour save in their own country. There, only foreigners may criticize with impunity, only foreigners impress. Thus, if Miss Shoe of Bootle dances well enough to earn her living in ballet, the first thing she is advised to do is to change her name to Shokoff or Schobetsky. Even in battle the English seem to prefer to be led by foreigners. Thus in the wars against Napoleon it was an Irishman who led the troops to victory, just as in the Great War a century later it was another Irishman who commanded the armies in France; and when he failed to achieve victory, he was succeeded by a Scotsman who was finally put under a Frenchman. So, too, in the sphere of government. It was a professing Jew, Benjamin Disraeli, who first conceived the idea of the British Empire as it is to-day, and won the romantic co-operation of a queen who could not bear the sight of her four-square English Gladstone: it was two Scots, Campbell-Bannerman and Balfour, who headed the respective Government and Opposition Benches at



the opening of the century: it was a Canadian who deposed the English Asquith in favour of the Welsh Lloyd George: and though it was the English Baldwin who turned out Lloyd George, not he but the Scottish Canadian Bonar Law succeeded him: whilst England's first Labour Prime Minister was, again, a Scot.

This curious trait in a conquering race is no doubt partly explained by the easy-going good nature and sheer laziness of its people. Assure an Englishman of his week-ends and his golf or football, and for all he cares the devil himself may rule him. But I think the real explanation lies deeper, and is that, way down in their subconscious selves Englishmen have long since decided, partly from laziness, partly from complacency, and partly from sincere conviction, that in some mysterious way they are innately superior to all the other nations of the earth. Therefore, smiling to themselves, they say: 'Let the foreign critics castigate and harangue us to their hearts' content, with their cries of Hypocrite! Perfidious Albion! and the rest—we shall not flinch nor take what they say too seriously. Likewise let the foreign leaders stand to the wheel on the captain's bridge, and play their pranks—we are on board too, watching, and our own good sense and native seamanship will keep the ship afloat in any storm.' Bernard Shaw sensed this, as every foreigner must, when he said that the Englishman overrated the Irishman 'with a generosity born of a traditional conviction of his own superiority in the deeper aspects of character.' It is quite in keeping with this anomalous attitude of giving authority to foreigners, therefore, that we English

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have suffered the Irish Bernard Shaw to settle among us and to set himself up as Public Thinker Number One. Truth to tell, we are delighted to have someone to think for us. We are grateful for advice, so long as we do not have to take it.

As publicity merchant Bernard Shaw tickled the public's palate so successfully that it kept on, and keeps on, asking for more, although for many years past he has been in no commercial need of lime-light. It is the public's fault; we refuse to let him retire from the publicity business; we make him work even when he is ill, squeezing copy from his very sickbed. When he holidays on the Mediterranean or by the Italian lakes, for instance, the world's newspapers break out into a veritable rash of pictures of Bernard Shaw, showing him in all kinds of postures and garments and lack of garments. We really cannot hold Shaw responsible for this sort of thing. At least I, for one, decline to believe that the first thing he does on arriving at his hotel or villa is to ring up the local Press and say: 'This is Bernard Shaw speaking. I am swimming to-morrow. Kindly send photographer.' The pictures appear simply because the ubiquitous local press photographer makes it his infernal business to be there and take them, because he and his editor know that you and I want them and like them and expect them, and because Shaw, always willing to oblige, smilingly submits. As the price of submission, however, he insists that the photographs shall not be haphazard snapshots, but that each one shall be thought out and posed with the art that conceals posing. And it is Shaw on such occasions who does most of the thinking out and posing. He

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is, by the way, a keen and highly skilled photographer himself, and his camera's most reluctant and elusive victim is his wife. All these considerations, then, the reporter's fear that he will be fired unless he gets the photographs, Shaw's willingness to help a journalist colleague, and his conviction that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well, all these are behind Monday's picture of Bernard Shaw Swimming Breast Stroke, behind Tuesday's of Bernard Shaw Floating, and behind Wednesday's of Shaw Turning Turtle. Thursday offers a picture of G. B. S. Submerged. But not for long, for Friday shows him standing on a raft in a pair of bathing drawers; Saturday, drying himself; and Sunday, completing the week's strange eventful history, a picture of Bernard Shaw Dry.

Until we let him alone we have only ourselves to blame. When his London home was in the now no longer existing Adelphi Terrace off the Strand, an enterprising burglar induced Mrs Shaw to put up at a bend in the beautiful Adams's staircase a grille made of iron spikes. Shaw commented that though it made the place look like the entrance to a private madhouse, and was obviously easily surmountable by any self-respecting burglar, it would come in handy to keep out reporters. A conceited man would keep open house for the Press.

In some respects Bernard Shaw behaves like a conceited person from a strict sense of duty. Sir Barry Jackson, as though in response to Shaw's remark about genius being denied recognition during its possessor's lifetime, instituted the Malvern Festival as a tribute to a living Bernard Shaw. The septuagenarian dramatist at once perceived in









MAURICE COLBOURNE

*At the Malvern Festival : G. B. S. shows Barry Jones how his  
news camera works*



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a perfectly objective and impersonal manner that he would have to appear at the Festivals in person, season by season, if visitors were to be fully satisfied with what they got for their money. With the ability to put himself in other people's shoes (to which much of his success as a playwright is due), Shaw realized that people would want to see him as well as his plays; and many is the time, when he has been feeling tired or unwell, that he has forced himself to go to the Malvern Theatre so that the audience should not be disappointed. That those upstairs may see him as advantageously as those downstairs, he sits in the front row of the dress circle, and in the intervals he makes a point of leaving his seat and placing himself on view, as though casually, outside in the open where the audience congregates. No doubt he is capable of enjoying his own plays, and no doubt he wants to stretch his legs in the intervals and breathe the clean hillside evening air; but primarily Shaw's behaviour at Malvern is dictated by the sincere wish to contribute what he can to the success of those responsible for a Festival called after him. He may be quite mistaken in thinking that people want to see him, or that his presence adds to the audience's pleasure and to the box-office receipts: but he is no more conceited on these occasions than Royalty when it elects to proceed on a rainy day, slowly in an open carriage, for the express purpose of being seen, instead of in a fast closed car.

This is all very well, someone will say, but there is no escaping the fact that many of Shaw's remarks as they appear in his works, or in the Press, or in this book, are the remarks of a conceited man. I do



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not think there is any need even to try to escape from this fact, because those words in the last sentence — 'as they appear' — explain it. Shaw's remarks as they appear in print are not as he made them. In print they lack two essentials—the manner and tone of their delivery. When his opinions are tossed off rapidly and lightly in a soft Dublin accent with a twinkle of the eye and (as I have called it before) a twinkle of the tongue, they appear no longer as they do in cold print, the intolerable assertions of an omniscient egomaniac, but as they really are, the sincere, unaffected words of a quick mind, a humorous talker, and a very human person; charming, courteous, and a good listener withal, whom you suspect nothing but humbug can anger, nothing but cruelty jar, and nothing but rudeness put out of countenance.

Yet in spite of the brogue and the twinkle, Shaw is fundamentally sincere and means every word he says. It is just that he likes to go 'the extra mile.' When he exaggerates he is not romancing or lying; he is exaggerating. He is so keen to demonstrate a truth that he puts it under a microscope before showing it to you, as Dickens did. Dickens's description of Mr Squeers's academy for young gentlemen, for instance, is full of exaggerations; yet no one denies the truth of its central point, that boys' schools in those days could be sinks of cruelty and tyranny. So with Bernard Shaw. But we must not anticipate discussion of this serious sincerity of his, which deserves a chapter to itself, and in due course shall have it. It is enough to say here that, when Shaw ends an argument, as he once did, with the words: 'I assert my intellectual

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superiority, that is all,' although some may hold those to be the words of an incurably conceited man, others will accept them at their face value. Then, with 'the extra mile' thrown in, they become simply the candid opinion of a man who, if he thinks that he is right and the other fellow wrong, is honest enough to say so. And I imagine that most of us prefer this kind of fighting manliness and honesty to the usual substitutes, such as bad temper, evasion, sulking, backbiting, or the insincere modesty that fishes for the equally insincere compliments of the kind current in mutual admiration societies.

'Why should I get another man to praise me when I can praise myself?' asks Bernard Shaw with relentless zest. Why indeed? Do we hear a voice answering that there is no reason at all, unless he fears that the praise of the other man will be less full-throated than his own, or, worse, inaudible, so that he must therefore fill the horrid silence with the blare of his own trumpet? Almost as though he had heard such a voice, Shaw tells it not to be silly and to listen. 'I really cannot respond to this demand for mock-modesty,' he explains. 'I am ashamed neither of my work nor of the way it is done. I like explaining its merits to the huge majority who don't know good work from bad. It does them good; and it does me good, curing me of nervousness, laziness, and snobbishness.' Could anything be more straightforward? If he is conceited, at least his conceit is honestly forthright and brazenly unaffected.

Not that the question of affectation in connection with Bernard Shaw can, I think, ever arise. That

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stigma, which attaches itself so easily to small men who succeed only in aping great ones, Shaw has never shown. As we said of him in the nineties, he has no time for posing. Oscar Wilde must have assumed a mass of affectations: but then he of all men had ample leisure in which to think them out. Even were Shaw willing to harbour growths so alien to his nature, he is far too busy to cultivate them.

There remains one further point to note: Bernard Shaw's deliberate comparison of himself with the world's great men. We have already seen how by implication he associates himself with men of genius in general, and with Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Sir Isaac Newton in particular; and it would be no exaggeration to say that a careful combing of Shaw's works would reveal a list of great names from which few would be missing. This association of himself with the great is not a direct one. He does not challenge comparison so much as insinuate it. When he is explaining or defending himself, he rightly calculates that the mere introduction of a great name will lend some of its own prestige to himself, add some of its own weight to his argument.

By pressing the immortals into his service Shaw is making a bid, conscious or not, for immortality for himself. Consider, for instance, the Prefaces. Every one of their quarter of a million words is aimed directly or otherwise at changing some opinion, smashing some convention, or effecting some reform; but aimed, so far, in vain. For fifty years and more their author has been trying to convert us, to impress us, to call us to repentance; and he has failed. Yet in his Introduction to the



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Prefaces, while frankly confessing his wholesale defeat to date, Shaw seeks to lift both his own fruitless self and his equally fruitless Prefaces to impressive heights by remarking, with elaborate casualness, that they are 'no more out of date than the Gospels, or Utopia, or Tom Jones, or Little Dorrit, or even the plays of Aristophanes and Euripides and the Socratic dialogues of Plato.' Again, in publishing his first novel, *Immaturity*, Shaw first disarms criticism by insisting that it is the book of 'a raw youth,' and then goes on to attribute to it the greatest possible merit as a work of immaturity, by comparing it, indirectly, with Beethoven's early septet for wind instruments. In this way the whole of Shaw's apologetical and polemical work is studded with great names, giving the impression of an irregular procession of the illustrious dead marching through his pages. By drawing our attention to their stature, Shaw seems to add imperceptibly to his own. He cannot even revisit his father's old business premises in Jervis Street, Dublin, without suggesting that he is making an archaeological discovery of the first importance. When he sees the name of the firm, he manages to invest himself subtly with some of the fame of a Tutankhamen, by describing how he found 'on one of the pillars of a small portico the ancient inscription "Clibborn and Shaw" still decipherable, as it were on the tombs of the Pharaohs.'

Is this conceit? Is it not rather the conscious and skilful practice of dialectical art, by which Shaw invests his arguments with impressiveness, authority, and strength? Then, too, mental association with the great is not unnatural to Bernard

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Shaw, who is fundamentally shy of his living fellows, who is at home only with the mighty dead, who lives imaginatively always on the heroic plane, and whose interests are held completely only by whole epochs and peoples. But I think the real reason for what must seem to many a form of megalomania is to be found on a higher plane. A man can think highly of his own work, with a kind of awful humility, because he believes it to be not his work at all but that of some Mighty Force operating through him. Such is Shaw's belief. Seriously he suggests that his novel, *The Irrational Knot*, is 'an early attempt on the part of the Life Force to write a *Doll's House* in English by the instrumentality of a very immature writer of 24.' And seriously he offers *Back to Methuselah* as a contribution towards a new Bible. Bernard Shaw the instrument, the mere mouthpiece and medium, must serve this Force with every fibre of his being, as a good servant serves his master. He must speak with the thunderous authority of such a master. To serve faithfully he will therefore strain every nerve to enlist the support of the great. Thus when Communism, for instance, is under discussion the eager servant is not content to enlist Karl Marx: he enlists Jesus. And if sometimes it appears that Jesus is agreeing with Shaw rather than Shaw with Jesus, that is only because the servant is anxious that there shall be no risk, if he can avoid it, that his mysterious master's message will not be heard, or its meaning not clearly understood.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HAS BERNARD SHAW CHANGED?

WE come to our second question. Most people would answer it in a hopeful affirmative. But, like most majorities, they would be wrong. Bernard Shaw, they hope, has changed for the milder and become respectable. He hasn't. He is no more respectable and no less revolutionary than ever. Why should he change his views? He has always got on well with them. Moreover, nothing has happened in the world to shake them: much, on the contrary, to confirm them. If the relationship between Shaw and society has changed, the change has been in society and not in Shaw. If Shaw seems nowadays more respectable, it is because society nowadays is less respectable. The post-war world, though it may be no happier than the pre-war world, is at least less inhibited. It refuses any longer to bow to idols it cannot believe in, even though it has found nothing in which it can believe. But it has at least begun to drag out its bogies into the light of day, and so rid them of their power to tyrannize and frighten.

Consider those exploded bogies, Socialism and Feminism, for instance, both of which Bernard Shaw upheld. Fifty years ago Socialists were the *enfants terribles* of politics, but when given the national latch-key in 1924 they showed then, and again in the General Strike two years later, no desire, presumably because they had no wild oats to sow, to paint either the town or the nation red.



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As to Feminism, women, having won their enfranchisement at the cost of incredible crimes and sacrifices by their leaders, immediately lost their influence in proportion as they gained their freedom; until to-day, after a generation of emancipation, the influence of women's votes is indiscernible. But in Shaw's heyday Votes for Women was a fearful bogey. It was considered very advanced to vote for Votes for Women so that they could vote Socialists into Parliament. But to-day it is considered advanced to ask, Why should anyone vote anybody into anything, seeing that the results are the same whatever Party is in so-called power? Others, turning back to the Tudor and Stuart forms of government, or to such peaceful dictatorial systems of government by consent as those in Portugal and Turkey, are even more advanced and ask, Why Parliament?

These questions bear directly upon Bernard Shaw. For the point is, not that Socialists have tasted office or that women have exercised the privilege of voting, and so have made Socialism and Feminism respectable, but that Shaw still remains advanced. The real Bernard Shaw is not necessarily always a Socialist: but he is necessarily always advanced. He would have changed had he turned Conservative or Liberal but, equally, had he remained a Socialist. He made none of these orthodox changes, though if he must be labelled, Socialist or Communist still describes him less imperfectly than any other label. His unchanging ✓ rebel spirit remains rebel. Always advanced, he remains advanced; so that to-day he questions the use of a parliament at all as an efficient instrument

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of government, with the result that as a political bird he finds himself able to perch with least intellectual discomfort, temporarily at any rate, in Russia. For Russia is as New to-day as Wagner and Ibsen were New in the nineties. By the time the Russian Experiment has been accepted and thereby become respectable, or, as seems more likely, has disintegrated, because it disregards the natural inequalities of human beings and their natural desire to possess, Shaw will have winged his way to some newer elsewhere, some other Never Never Land. There will always be something New somewhere, always some 'Ism' in the bud for Shaw the adventurous to nibble. Each in turn he will boost as potentially the perfect form of government, until each in turn, as it materializes in office and reveals its faults, disgusts him. However, we need not waste much sympathy over the fruitlessness of his search, because seeking but not finding, travelling but never arriving, suits Bernard Shaw; for to the constitutional rebel, the satisfaction of discovery means stagnation, and arrival is only another name for death. Besides, even if he found his system of perfect government, I doubt whether he would altogether like it except on paper.

Again, how could Shaw possibly change, being the mystic he is? A mystic does not change his views; he cannot. If he could, he would cease to be a mystic. He can change the style of their expression (which may develop into all manner of intricate beauty and abundance), but that is not the same thing. For the mystic arrives at his philosophy of life, not by laborious reasoning, but by divination, an immediate, instinctive process.

accomplished without effort and as irresistibly as the light broke on Paul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. The man of reason, on the other hand, to be a philosopher, must add up his data, fact to fact and figure to figure, until he finds their total. In short, the truth about life comes to the mystic as a vision, whilst to the man of reason it comes by calculation. The mystic knows the answer all along, and what he has to do is not an addition sum but a jigsaw puzzle, fitting the facts before him into the vision already seen. The mystic's picture may be no nearer the absolute truth than the man of reason's calculation, but at least it cannot be falsified by mathematical errors. It is the man of reason, therefore, who is liable to change his views, because he is liable to change the total of his sum. But the mystic, because it is not his to alter or deny, must perforce be content with his original vision. Where the man of reason grows by discovering new things, the mystic, denied growth, can but interpret things both new and old that he has known mystically for ever. As Sir Godfrey Kneller exclaims in Shaw's picture of Good King Charles's Golden Days: 'Man: artists do not prove things. They do not need to. They KNOW them.' G. K. Chesterton once said that he could lie awake at night and hear H. G. Wells growing. No one could ever say this of Bernard Shaw, who stands serenely pat and pugnacious where he has always stood, at the threshold of a tent, eager to explain his vision to all who care to step inside. Does he beat a drum? Yes; and from a sense of duty he beats it loudly. 'It is only the man who has no message who is too fastidious to beat the drum at the door of his booth.'



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(The conviction that his vision is a mystical one and not of his own making sometimes saves Shaw trouble. For when taken to task over a point he can always say 'Inspiration' to his critic, as he once said 'Press' to the street musician, and go his way. Thus, being asked, after the first night of Heart-break House, the meaning of a certain passage, Shaw replied: 'How should I know? I'm only the author.' Similarly, if you complain that no Roman Emperor ever spoke as Shaw's Emperor in Androcles and The Lion, he will answer that his Emperor speaks more truly than any real emperor because he speaks for all emperors, just as his martyrs are the martyrs of all time. And if you point out that as a historical play Androcles and The Lion is not historically true, Shaw will reply that 'the best dramatic art is the operation of a divinatory instinct for truth.' Or if you ask him what he means by his tale of The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God, he can give you only his own account of the matter 'for what it is worth,' warning you that he is as liable as any one else to err in his interpretation, and that 'pioneer writers, like other pioneers, often mistake their destination as Columbus did.' But, he adds, enlisting more great names, 'I hold, as firmly as St Thomas Aquinas, that all truths, ancient or modern, are divinely inspired; but I know by observation and introspection that the instrument on which the inspiring force plays may be a very faulty one, and may even end, like Bunyan in the Holy War, by making the most ridiculous nonsense of his message.'

To describe Bernard Shaw as a mystic, after having regarded him hitherto as a two-eyed Irish

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rationalist, involves no contradiction. A rational mystic is a perfectly possible person, being simply a person with a vision of the truth about life who insists that that vision shall be explicable in terms acceptable to his reason, and not in those which insult his intelligence by demanding the help of superstitions that normally could impose only on the village idiot. The mystical vision and the facts of experience must be made to fit each other without the help of mumbo-jumbo.

Shaw has always been aware of this kind of changeless vision, and of his possession of an inner light. Discussing the difference between his earlier and later work, he writes: 'Like Goethe, I knew all along, and have added more to my power of handling, illustrating, and addressing my material than to the material itself.' This changelessness is easily discernible in his works. For instance, exactly the same anti-romanticism which he preached in the nineteenth century through the chocolate-eating mouth of his Swiss soldier in *Arms and the Man* (six years, by the way, before Queen Victoria sent her soldiers in South Africa chocolates for Christmas), appears in the twentieth century in *Saint Joan*, which ends, not with the usual romantic glow of flames from the stake but with an anti-romantic top hat from Rome.) Strong aversion to the private doctor's vested interest in ill health enlivened *The Philanderer*, in the person of Dr Paramour, in 1893; exactly the same aversion filled the full-dress debate of *The Doctor's Dilemma* in 1906, and survives unaltered in *Too True To Be Good* and *The Millionairess* in 1936. Exactly the same philosophy that was enshrined in *Man and*

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Superman appears twenty years later in *Back to Methuselah*, and thirty-five years later in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*; the difference between these plays being one of degree and address only, never one of substance. The furrows of conviction have only deepened the philosophy into a religion. Lilith and Pra and Prola succeed Don Juan, but all say the same thing. Again, when Shaw was struggling and obscure and red-bearded and had nothing to lose, he tub-thumped and helped to found the Socialist Fabian Society; and when he was famous, rich, and white-bearded, he toiled to write *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, to propagate those same Fabian doctrines.

It is politically, of course, that people like to think that Bernard Shaw has changed, and become cosily conservative; and do what he will Shaw finds it hard to convince them that he is, as he was, a revolutionary. But he makes it as clear as he can. At a public meeting, for instance, a man got up shaking with anger and shouted at Bernard Shaw: 'Are you a Bolshevist or are you not?' Shaw, folding his arms and smiling benignly, said: 'I am a Bolshevist.' Again, at the appearance of *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, most people reacted as though someone had hic-coughed in polite society for a joke; that is, they disregarded the book and went on talking about the weather: others, who read the book, and took the author's sincerity for granted, felt that an elderly gentleman's solecism should be forgiven him, because, after all, it had been committed in senility: while the rest, just because the author had been considerate enough to make his exceedingly long



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book' readable by sprinkling a heavy theme with wit and leavening a ton of text with an ounce of humour, found nothing in the book but a leg-pull, administered by someone who apparently had nothing better to do, and was obviously suffering from a severe attack of obstinacy. Similarly, because Bernard Shaw once exercised his talent for debate by writing a comedy in which a puppet king outwitted his puppet minister, the public jumped to the conclusion that he had turned Royalist, and was liable to turn up in the Mall with a flag in his hand, to wave when next the King of England drove by; whereas, of course, *The Apple Cart* is important and suggestive chiefly for the peep it gives of its villain in the shape of Breakages, Limited.

That Shaw has had the good fortune to accumulate some money, and has the good sense to use and enjoy the amenities of the modern world, seems to prevent people from realizing that, simultaneously and with a quiet conscience, he can hold perfectly sincere political views which, put into effect, would change the whole order of society. But Shaw cannot perform miracles. Having expressed the opinion that it would be about as easy to get scrambled eggs from a sewing-machine as Socialism from the English Labour Party, he is content to live as happily as he can in a society of whose structure he disapproves. Like a monetary reformer who gladly makes use of his cheque book and all the other conveniences afforded by the banking system, while ardently advocating the most radical alterations to that system, Shaw refuses to play the martyr, or to cut off his nose to spite his face, and insists on making the best of what is

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theoretically a bad job. Some Communists made the same mistake about Anatole France. They journeyed all the way from Paris to enlist his help, confident of the sympathy of one who had lashed Church and Finance and all the other pillars of society with such Olympian authority. Alas, while waiting for the great Frenchman in an ante-room, they were so overcome by its evidences of wealth and culture that they fled precipitately and never saw him. Socialism can never be practised except in a community of Socialists. A man who tried to practise it in a capitalist community, even if the law permitted, would be acting more like a sore thumb than a Socialist. The remedy is to be a Socialist on paper. The arm-chair Socialist can lacerate, pull down, and rebuild society to his heart's content. When Shaw is accused of arm-chair Socialism, or, by the more impatient of his brethren, of actual apostasy, to defend himself he takes refuge among the highest, thus: 'Even in Syria in the time of Jesus His teachings could not possibly have been realized by a series of independent explosions of personal righteousness on the part of the separate units of the population.' Moreover, the people who accuse Shaw of degenerating into an arm-chair critic forget that he was never anything else. They should note, however, that his arm-chair is a hard one, and always drawn up to his desk.

Shaw himself is as anxious as any one to dispel the illusion that he has become respectable, which he says is bad for the sale of his works. 'Nobody reads me,' he laments. 'They all regard me as a classic and treat me like an archbishop.' If this is

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true, if we have kicked Shaw upstairs into a sort of literary House of Lords, he must take what comfort he can from the fact that nowadays it is not the fashion to treat archbishops with respect; for, thanks partly to him, we no longer look upon our elders as our betters. Maybe, however, it is true that he is losing some of his power of irritating the public, of provoking it to thought, argument, and disagreement. The public is too used to him and can anticipate too closely what he will say. He has become approachable, it seems; and in his eighties he looks strokable. To his mingled delight and horror he finds himself popular after a long period of unpopularity, like Queen Victoria. Now popularity is a serious matter to the rebel, for it cuts the ground from under his feet. When all agree with the rebel, from whom shall he rebel? In any case I do not imagine that Shaw craves for popularity, or can thrive on it. Just as he realized that Joan the Maid's power was at its height when she was most dangerous and when the churchmen called her heretic and the soldiers had to burn her, so I imagine Bernard Shaw wrote feelingly when he made her say: 'Woe unto me when all men praise me!' But I do not think that Shaw need worry. He is popular only because he makes us laugh. His opinions about the serious things, such as war, love, private property, and religion, are still as unpopular to those in control of them as ever they were. As for the popularity or unpopularity of his message, the question has not yet arisen, because the people have not yet heard the message. And nothing, least of all the films, will ever bring it to them. They will have to go to it, and they



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will not do that until they are driven by affliction and despair, by which time it may be too late.

Success and security have, of course, exacted their toll from Bernard Shaw. He is but human. But it is difficult to imagine how any one could show their marks less. Security, or 'mortal's chiefest enemy,' as Shakespeare puts it, and success, as this world counts it, have come to Bernard Shaw in abundance, yet neither has spoilt him. To him, money has meant little but the mental freedom to work untrammelled by petty anxieties or by that spectre of insecurity, the Fear for Tomorrow's Dinner. Nor has Shaw known idleness. Having contracted the habit of work in early manhood, he has never been able to break himself of it. But here our wretchedly inadequate vocabulary, suited only to the age of scarcity and its obsolescent economics, plays me false. For we still commonly mistake leisure for idleness. Leisure is not idleness, of course, but the opportunity, given by God and to be taken by man, of applying oneself to work, which is not less arduous or difficult for being gladly undertaken and voluntarily self-imposed. Like all great work, Shaw's has been accomplished in leisure. In the inadequate economic sense of the word, however, Shaw has never 'worked' since he stopped 'earning a living,' though it was only then that his real work began, out of hours and after 'retirement.'

Because his work was also a fight it was a joy to him. Past and future could take care of themselves; it was the present that mattered, the actual fight on hand, whatever it might be. To him, as to Bunyan's Christian, the journey was the thing.

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✓ succeeded is to have finished one's business on earth, like the male spider, who is killed by the female the moment he has succeeded in his courtship. I like a state of continual *becoming*, with a goal in front and not behind.' I suppose all of us feel like that; and I quote the passage, not because it is exceptional, but because it is a relief to find Shaw juxtaposing himself beside the humble spider instead of the usual Beethovens and Goethes.

Another thing about Bernard Shaw that never changes is his style. He writes for the moment only, and in the heat of that moment, maintaining that that is the only way to write for all time. In short, he is a journalist. If a writer is not a journalist, or ceases to be one, he is negligible. All the highest literature is journalism, he says; and what determines the artistic quality of a book is not so much the nature of the opinions it propagates as the fact that its writer has opinions. This disposes in a sentence of the Art for Art's Sake idea, and if it seems too sweeping it at least can call as witnesses most of the authors of that literary treasure house, the Bible. The prophets prophesied, or railed, or comforted, because they wanted to reach the hearts of the Children of Israel, not because they wanted to utter beautiful words. St Paul wanted to convert the inhabitants of Greece and Asia Minor, not to write beautiful letters. And the more passionately they wanted to do these things, the more journalistically they wrote and spoke; such passages as the thirteenth chapter to the Corinthians, and the exhortation beginning: 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,' being the result. Similarly, Solomon wrote or sang his Song because he was in love, not

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to compete for a university prize for poetry. Shaw uses other examples to illustrate his theme, as in the following passage, which I quote at some length as a good example of his journalistic style. 'The writer who aims at producing the platitudes which are "not for an age, but for all time" has his reward in being unreadable in all ages; whilst Plato and Aristophanes trying to knock some sense into the Athens of their day, Shakespeare peopling the same Athens with Elizabethan mechanics and Warwickshire hunts, Ibsen photographing the local doctors and vestrymen of a Norwegian parish, Carpaccio painting the life of St Ursula exactly as if she were a lady living in the next street to him, are still alive and at home everywhere among the dust and ashes of many thousands of academic, punctilious, most archaeologically correct men of letters and art who spent their lives haughtily avoiding the journalist's vulgar obsession with the ephemeral. I also am a journalist, proud of it, deliberately cutting out of my works all that is not journalism, convinced that nothing that is not journalism will live long as literature, or be of any use whilst it does live. I deal with all periods; but I never study any period but the present, which I have not yet mastered and never shall.' What attack! What clarity, and sense of ease in the handling of weapons! If this is journalism (and it is), no wonder Shaw cries: 'Let others cultivate what they call literature: journalism for me!'

If a literary artist or journalist, for these are one, writes as accurately and as effectively as he can, then his style will take care of itself—if he has anything to say. If he has nothing to say, he will have no



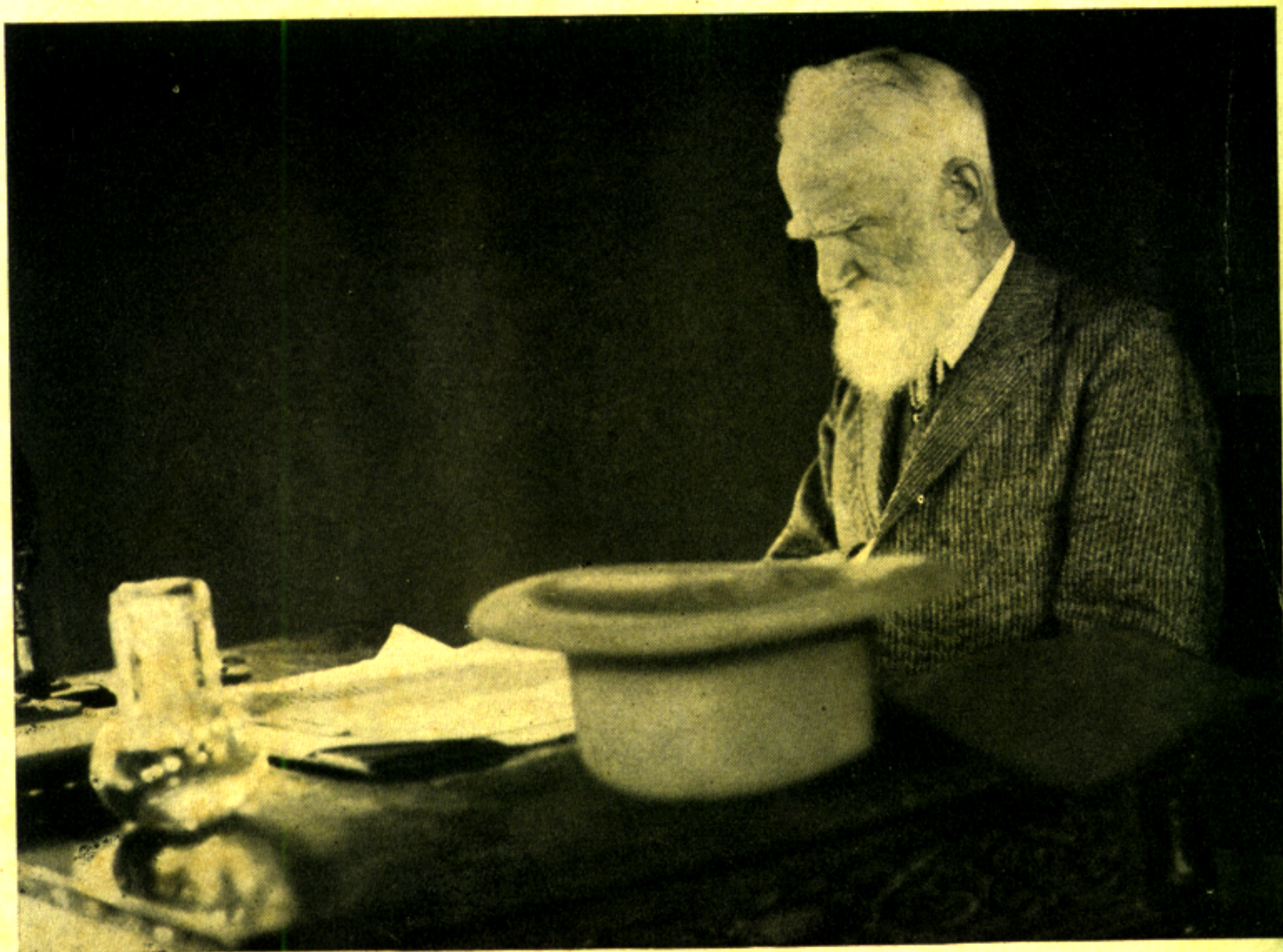
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style. 'Effectiveness of assertion is the alpha and omega of style,' declares Shaw. He preaches what he practises; for, always concerned only to see that his assertions are made as effectively as possible, he has never aimed at style in his life. This, however, is by no means to say that he, any more than any other disciplined writer, can do without rules. One of the first rules he adopted as a youthful writer of novels, was to avoid idiom like the plague, and to write nothing that would not be intelligible to a foreigner with a dictionary. Later, he abandoned that rule, having come to the conclusion that idiom was 'the most highly vitalized form of language.' And idiom and proverb he has since used accordingly, until these have become a characteristic of the Shavian style. It would for instance be a matter for surprise if any long, musical and easy-flowing sentence, ending with the advice to somebody to 'keep his breath to cool his porridge,' turned out not to be by Bernard Shaw. But all rules are adopted, or modified, or discarded, solely to make his material more effective, never to make it stylish.

In one other way Shaw will never change. He will always be a bit of an actor. We have seen how as a young man he had to decide between presenting a bold front to the world and going under, and we remember how he walked the Embankment for twenty minutes summoning up courage to ring the bell of the house where he was bidden to supper. Well, he decided not to go under. Accordingly he fashioned for himself a mask suitable for dealing with all kinds of people on all kinds of occasions. In thus becoming an actor by self-propulsion as it were, he discovered that he was already one by







G.P.A.



CENTRAL PRESS

*Above : About to broadcast at the B.B.C.  
Below : Speaking in South Kensington on the site of the  
National Theatre*



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birth. The mask was gradually built up of prophet's beard, devil's tufts, and goat-god eyebrows; the result proving admirably suitable for the various parts he had to play as critic, dramatist, orator, revolutionary, or crank. At first the mask fitted so well that Shaw never wanted to remove it, and later, with constant use, it became so part of him that he could not have removed it had he wished. He is still wearing it, therefore, and as a self-confessed 'natural born mountebank,' Shaw has long headlined as a free-lance world star. Under contract to no manager, he makes his appearances on the world's Variety Circuit when he pleases, always topping the bill, and always hailed with delight as a funny man. Footlights he regards as antiquated: the microphone for him. Why act before thousands when you can act before millions? Who but a born actor, revelling in a star part, and confident of his ability to give a brilliant, word-perfect performance, would dare to start a radio speech as follows: 'Your Majesties, your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, your Graces and Reverences, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow citizens of all degrees'? And who but a very good actor, with the inborn ability to pitch his material in the right key from the start, could have got away with it?

Shortly after the war which ended in 1918 Shaw essayed a new role: that of old man. His first appearance in it was on the publication of *Back to Methuselah*. 'My sands are running out; the exuberance of 1901 has aged into the garrulity of 1920,' he laments, and goes on to plead that he is doing the best he can at his age. 'My powers are waning; but so much the better for those who

✓ found me unbearably brilliant when I was in my prime.' It was a piece of acting, I think, because no less than twelve more plays, Saint Joan among them, were to follow from his pen. But it was a useful piece of acting, because of all his plays *Back to Methuselah* (five plays in itself) conveys his message most fully, and if the pentalogy was not quite up to Shavian standard owing to its immensity of theme, Shaw, like an anxious parent, wanted to divert criticism from it to himself, and to maintain the prestige of his message was willing to cast aspersions on the messenger.

Yet behind these remarks there may have been more than the actor's plea for indulgence on account of age, for Shaw found that the dreadful time was not after eighty, but between fifty and sixty. 'You fear then that you may develop into a doddering idiot, fit material for elimination. But after that you seem to get your second childhood, your seventh wind. You have a delightful sense of freedom.' Few of us can argue with Shaw on these points, for he was a lad well over eighty when he made them. 'As you grow old,' he says, 'you grow too adventurous; you lose your sober sense of responsibility.' Thus, even at eighty he can still stand on his head, like Old Father William. And in that position, dignified by long use, he waggles his feet playfully in the air to prove that they, alone of all feet, are firmly and permanently planted on the ground.

Old at sixty or young at eighty, adventurous or responsible, Bernard Shaw has not changed. He is always the same in everything that matters. All his developments are reflections of his one first

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vision; all his plays form a cycle of mystical faith in which he proclaims that each one of us is a Man of Destiny, a servant of the Life Force, a temple of the Holy Ghost. He has not lost his fire. And if ever he needed help to fan it, perhaps the best assistance would be to point out, in John Stewart Collis's memorable phrase, that whereas Shaw's beard was formerly red-hot with anger it is now white-hot with rage.



## CHAPTER IX

### IS BERNARD SHAW SERIOUS?

WHEN *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* was produced in New York in 1935, it was hailed by one of that discerning city's more intelligent critics, as the work of a dignified old monkey throwing coconuts at the public in pure senile devilment. In thus describing Bernard Shaw, the critic was reflecting, in an amusing but accurate way, the opinion of the world at large.

People simply will not take Shaw seriously. Yet, as indicated already in these pages, to be taken seriously is one of Shaw's chief aims and dearest cares. It is a laudable ambition, and still to be achieved, although Shaw himself could hardly be more unequivocal on the subject, as these samples of his utterances show.

'I care only for my mission as I call it, and my work.'

'No doubt that literary knack of mine which happens to amuse the British public distracts attention from my character; but the character is there none the less, solid as bricks.'

x 'My conscience is the genuine pulpit article: it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable; and I insist on making them think in order to bring them to conviction of sin.'

Such remarks are to be found strewn through Shaw's works as plentifully as daisies in June. Their very profusion suggests that all his life Shaw

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has had to face a charge of wanton levity; and their assertiveness shows his anxiety to be quit of such a charge. Yet the impression that he will do or say anything to raise a laugh persists. Why is this? For he also gives the impression that he will do or say anything to counteract that impression. In the exercise of his literary gifts he must experience at least a craftsman's pleasure, just as a marksman enjoys scoring bull's-eyes at a rifle range; yet even that pleasure, natural and legitimate though it is, Shaw minimizes and puts second, in a desperate attempt to focus our attention on his high purpose and serious-mindedness. 'Art for Art's sake is not enough,' he insists. 'No doubt I must recognize, as even the Ancient Mariner did, that I must tell my story entertainingly if I am to hold the wedding guest spellbound in spite of the siren sounds of the loud bassoon. But "for art's sake" alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence.' Art, craftsmanship, comedy, literature, these things are mere instruments and by-products, secondary and incidental: what matters is his message. Where the marksman scores bull's-eyes for the sheer joy of good marksmanship, Shaw scores them because behind each target he senses an enemy to be destroyed; with the result that he turns up at the rifle range, not as a simple marksman out for the fun of the thing, but as a cross between Don Quixote in modern dress and a sanitary exterminator, much to our amusement.

Are we to believe him when he declares himself an essentially serious person? If such a suggestion only makes us laugh all the more heartily, we must be prepared to face the fact that we are deliberately

choosing to disbelieve the considered statements of a man who, in the teeth of opposition, has made it his special province to tell the truth, as he sees it, about this world and the people in it, more unvarnishedly, unreservedly, publicly, and unceasingly than any other person within living memory.

What is the trouble, then? Why do we not take Bernard Shaw as seriously as, say, the Hebrews took their prophets or the Florentines Savonarola? Clearly, I think, because Shaw, though always serious, is never solemn. Somehow we find it almost impossible to believe that any one can mean what he says unless he pulls a long face while saying it. Shaw not only pulls no long faces, but his most serious expression cannot banish for long that fatal twinkle in the eye, and when he opens his mouth he cannot prevent his tongue from being wittily unruly. Wit: that is the trouble. In both senses of the verb, Shaw suffers from wit. Constitutional and incorrigible wit has been his undoing; just as sometimes it has been his salvation. Savonarola, not being witty, was burnt alive by those whom his bludgeon hurt. Shaw, on the other hand, confesses that his mother wit has many times saved him from the stake's modern equivalent. Such escapes, however, have had to be paid for, and in Shaw's case the price was high; for he has had to suffer the anguish of preaching, not to empty benches, but to packed congregations of deaf persons who came to church only to watch the funny preacher's antics and grimaces. Where he offers sermons they find only entertainments, and when he would administer mental and spiritual purgatives in the form of bitter pills considerately sugar-coated, what do the un-



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grateful people do but enjoy the sugar and refuse the pill? The sugar alone, they say, is worth the price of admission. Having paid the piper, they hear only the notes of their favourite tune in whatever the piper plays. Thus Back to Methuselah is remembered chiefly for its Serpent and its length, or for its portraits of Asquith and Lloyd George; Pygmalion for its 'Not bloody likely!'; Mrs Warren's Profession for being banned for so long; Fanny's First Play for the trimmings of its prologue and epilogue; Candida for its scene of Prossy tipsy; Arms and the Man for being a sort of unmusical version of a musical comedy called The Chocolate Soldier; and so on. Poor Shaw! The Prophet Jeremiah lamented that the Children of Israel had come to regard him only 'as one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument.' The Prophet Shaw knows just how he felt.

However pleasant Shaw's voice may be, the things he says with it are rarely pleasant. His views are never popular, his opinions never orthodox, his convictions never conventional. If they were, they would be out of date; and that is something a self-confessed heretic like Shaw can never afford to be, because the heretic is no longer a heretic when all men believe in his heresy. The heretic, the reformer, the prophet, the revolutionary must always march ahead of the times, never with them. That is their function. And if they are successful they will be duly stoned, burnt, hanged, imprisoned, or banned, according to the age and place they live in. Nor will they escape these fates unless they happen to possess, as Shaw possesses, in addition

to disturbing visions and iconoclastic zeal, the specific artistic talent of the mountebank. Then they will be spared, as Shaw has been spared, because the mountebank's amusing antics divert the mob's attention from the reformer's dangerous preachings, and if the mob by any chance does pay attention to these, the mountebank instinctively makes the kind of answer that turns away the wrath they would otherwise arouse.

In Bernard Shaw's plays the mountebank in him takes the part of imp, and a prominent part it is. He appears in every play. Sir James Barrie was also possessed of an imp, but his was elfin rather than mountebank. Describing how his plays came to be written, Barrie pictured himself, pen in hand, plodding away prosaically, when all of a sudden there would come to him another being, distinct and yet of himself, who would take complete charge of the situation and proceed to write the famous Barrie whimsicalities while Barrie held the pen. Barrie and his elf were great friends. Indeed, the Scot felt so grateful and indebted to the little creature that he acknowledged it publicly by name, and called it Maconachie. Shaw's imp, on the other hand, has not been christened, at any rate publicly, since it is doubtful whether its host will feel at all indebted to it when all the accounts are balanced. For Shaw candidly confesses his inability to sustain a period of tragic writing, or even serious writing, beyond a certain point. At that point the imp, whom we may call Joey the Clown, seizes hold of him in the form of an irresistible impulse to end the whole thing in a joke. No sooner are Shaw and the Tragic Muse comfortably

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in session than Joey starts knocking on the door. Perhaps he is jealous. Whatever the reason, Bernard Shaw always lets him in. The result is that even his unpleasant plays have to be specifically labelled Unpleasant lest the brilliance of their comedy should mask their real import, which is, of course, an unpleasant and essentially serious one. Typical of the way Joey skips through the plays crying 'Hold, enough!' whenever he comes across a passage of deep feeling, is Caesar's salutation to the Sphinx in *Caesar and Cleopatra*. After Caesar has spoken for some minutes in a vein of grave beauty suitably attuned to the moonlit night and the silence of the desert, Cleopatra addresses him as 'Old Gentleman!' The effect, of course, is very funny, but is achieved at the expense of all the gravity and beauty that have gone before. Atmosphere and illusion dissolve, and Caesar's speech topples down at Cleopatra's remark like a house of cards. This sort of thing is called the Shavian touch: but the hand is the hand of Joey.

Shaw's tear ducts and lachrymose glands are presumably fashioned like other people's, but they do not operate from the same causes, and when others cry Shaw remains dry-eyed. Tragedy does not move him merely because it is tragic. At his mother's funeral, for instance, he is reputed to have joked with Granville-Barker; while the tragedy of the War was to him primarily a tragedy of stupidity, of loss in the sense of waste, and as such it made him angry and want to curse, not cry. Of course, what are tragedies to other people, often are not tragedies to Shaw; funerals, for example; but that does not affect the point, which is simply that



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Shaw does not weep when other people weep. 'Sorrow does not make me cry,' he says, 'even when it is real.' The only thing that can bring tears to his eyes is the sensation or apprehension of perfection, the sight of something beautifully done; and in the fact that he can be touched in that way lies his whole claim to be a critic of art.

Somehow one feels that Bernard Shaw is so sensitive to beauty that excess of it is apt to embarrass him. Beauty affects people in different ways. A friend of mine, for instance, was so overcome by the beauty of the interior of Milan Cathedral, which at dawn he had found fortunately empty, that he was physically sick. The cathedral got him, as the saying goes. I do not wish to involve Bernard Shaw in the nervous reflexes of my friend or of any one else, but I cannot help feeling, if he were to show Joey the door and write a play of jokeless, undiluted seriousness and beauty, that when he had finished it he would find himself blushing. Beauty can take such hold of those who are sensitive to its appeal that it must be kept at a safe distance and taken in small doses if its votary or victim is to keep his powers of reasoning and judgment clear. Almost as a safeguard from too much beauty and its disturbances, then, Shaw seems to take refuge in a kind of cold derision, and to behave in all emotional matters as a Laodicean rather than an impotent.

Moreover, he takes delight in extending his derision to all those simple, traditional things and customs which normally move men to emotion. Whether it be the ceremonies attending the mysteries of birth and death, or the sacraments of

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kingship and marriage, or the observance of birthdays, his own or Christ's, or merely the cheering of a crowd in the distance or the unfurling of a flag, that these are commonly matters for emotion is enough to impel Shaw to deride them. But the man who scoffs at the traditional things which men, rightly or wrongly, hold sacred, and which, because they are held sacred, are the source and fount of communal emotion, is not the man to write high tragedy, except about things understandable only by himself. For what is tragedy but the profanation of things held sacred? If nothing is regarded as sacred, then there is nothing left to profane. Shaw is aware of the handicaps he suffers as a writer from his incorrigible impulse to deride. Criticizing the author of his own first play, *Widowers' Houses*, he admits that 'the disillusion which makes all great dramatic poets tragic has here made him only derisive; and derision is by common consent a baser atmosphere than that of tragedy.' Not only baser, but sterile too. In that freezing atmosphere laughter may resound and ring, but it rings hollow, tickling everything and healing nothing.

When Shaw threw overboard the stage's stock figures of romance, those he offered in their place, while interestingly real and human, were not 'nice'; any more than live people are 'nice' when exposed or dissected. To make them as palatable as possible, therefore, it was necessary to allow Joey full rein, with the result that the author's main meaning was obscured in proportion as the audience laughed. For the audience, hopelessly at sea, clutched hold of Joey whenever he appeared as though he were a lifebelt, and on being assured by him that the new

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stage figures were only figures of fun (didn't Joey guarantee their laughter-provoking powers?), sighed with relief. If the author was joking, all was well; not only need he not be taken seriously, but he could also be forgiven, because though he had outraged the conventions he had done so only in fun. To this attitude Shaw could only reply in despair that, since they would have it so, he was only joking. But he was careful to add, through the mouthpiece of Peter Keegan: 'My way of joking is to tell the truth: it's the funniest joke in the world.' Similarly, people who ask whether Shaw is pulling their legs can be assured that he is pulling them hard; but only because he thinks they are crooked and need pulling straight.

Joey's impishness and Shaw's derisiveness joined forces with chortling glee in a play that so far has never been written. Offering the plot to any one who cared to use it, Shaw described a world so far in the future that it has forgotten how to make war. When England, therefore, either because she is becoming flabby or for some other reason wishes to go to war, her Cabinet decide to employ a medium to raise the spirit of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey, and find out from him how the thing should be done. The spirit is duly raised, the Unknown Soldier materializing in the most up-to-date ectoplasm, and is asked how war was waged in the olden days. He answers in German! Now that is a joke in bitter taste; and no one would appreciate it simply as a joke more than Shaw the Derider. But if he decided to write a play around that joke, its message, judging from his other plays, would be an intensely serious one.



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Having come to some sort of conclusion, then, that Bernard Shaw is intellectually honest rather than personally conceited, that he is the same now as he has always been, and, although misunderstood owing to his wit, handicapped through his derisiveness, and led astray by Joey the Clown, that he is essentially a serious person, the next question follows naturally. What is it that this honest, unchanging, and serious person is so honest, unchanging, and serious about?

Luckily Shaw is concise and explicit on the point. Before hearing him, however, it is well to understand the meaning of such words as 'moral' and 'immoral' as he uses them. Shaw attaches to these words, not their specialized meaning concerning the relations between the sexes in particular, but their full classical meaning concerning the manners, habits, customs, conventions, and institutions of humanity in general. Thus when he speaks of Luther's 'revolting immorality' in not only marrying when he was a priest but in actually marrying a nun, he does not mean that Luther was a bad lot and guilty of disgusting licentiousness: he means literally what he writes; namely, that Luther revolted against the then prevalent custom, or morality, of celibacy for priests. Similarly, a moral man is not simply one who forbears to run off with his neighbour's wife, but one who abides by the general rules and customs imposed on him by the laws and social conventions of his time and country. In proportion as he fails to abide by these, so he becomes immoral, for whatever is contrary to established customs is immoral. An immoral act or attitude is not therefore necessarily a sinful one.

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On the contrary, every advance in thought and conduct is immoral until the majority has subscribed to it. So when Shaw declares himself 'a moral revolutionary' he is not hoisting the libertine's flag: he is simply revolting against all custom which has not the sanction of conscience; all habits which are based either on a false perception of life or on a refusal to face life; all laws which have outgrown the conditions for which they were made; and all society's institutions which support or countenance such customs, habits, and laws. If that be so, the reader may say that the moral revolutionary has his work cut out. He has. His study of mankind is nothing short of man; of natural man in his relation to society; of man as God intended him to be, contrasted with man as he has fallen short of that stature.

With this comprehensive view of the moral revolutionary in mind, we can understand better what Bernard Shaw meant when he wrote to the late H. M. Hyndman, and in the following terms declined that Socialist leader's invitation to take an active part in the class war: 'I am a moral revolutionary, interested, not in class war, but in the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality, and distinguishing not between capitalist and proletarian, but between moralist and natural historian.' The fight, in short, is between Custom and Conscience, with Shaw fighting for the latter. Referring to what might be called Shaw's guerrilla actions in this fight, William James once said: 'To me, Shaw's great service is the way he brings home to the *eyes*, as it were, the difference between convention and conscience, and the way

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he shows that you can tell the truth successfully if you will only keep benignant enough while doing it.'

Now that we have an inkling of what Shaw is after, we can return with profit to his plays. Strip them of wit, cast out Joey the Clown, and what is left? (All that matters: namely, a body of revolutionary criticism aimed at all our most cherished social institutions with the object of altering them. For what purpose? So that after alteration they may fit Conscience instead of Custom. Customs grow stale, laws obsolete, conventions meaningless. Yet we persist in observing them long after their usefulness is past. They are dead, and in reverencing them we are dealing with death instead of life. If they are not buried when they are dead they become fetters, holding man back and hampering him in his journey towards godhead and the life more abundant. It is from these dead tyrannies that Shaw would deliver us, as a good forester strips a tree of the ivy strangling it. It is life that matters: nothing else. And life is dynamic, never static; ever changing, never still. Let men and women, then, open their gates and the windows of their souls to the New and to the Changing, and let the spirit of revolt and heresy and immorality blow freely through the rooms of their minds, for in these is life. And to make way for these, let them first throw out their dead, ruthlessly and, in a very real sense, religiously. To use one of Shaw's favourite metaphors, we must be careful to empty out our dirty water before pouring in our clean.

We are no longer surprised, therefore, when Bernard Shaw describes as follows his career and his purpose as a playwright. 'I am not an ordinary



playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays.' Seeing that this statement was addressed to the Lord Chamberlain's Department, we can imagine the impish glee with which he chose and penned its strictly accurate and perfectly serious wording. Continuing, he says: 'I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion in these matters. I have no other effectual incentive to write plays, as I am not dependent on the theatre for my livelihood. If I were prevented from producing immoral and heretical plays, I should cease to write for the theatre, and propagate my views from the platform and through books.' He could hardly have made his position clearer.

Instead of regarding the plays, then, as mere vehicles for jokes, or as acrobatic spectacles with most of the characters on their heads and the arguments turning cartwheels, we must regard them as essentially serious attacks upon society. Looked at from their author's standpoint, therefore, the plays range not from farce to near tragedy, or from comedy to melodrama, but rather from slumlandlordism to militarism, from prostitution to marriage, from husband-hunting to politics, from professional tyrannies to totalitarian tyrannies, from the Christianity that passes for Christianity to questions of conscience and Creative Evolution. Indeed, so wide is their range that only one corner of our institutions has he not attacked: the corner of Finance, which some would call the very foundation of modern society, and with this strange omission we shall have to deal when discussing Shaw as an economist.

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In practice, any attack on society becomes an attack on its ideals, and it is these which Shaw tries to undermine and knock down. He is against idealism because he is all for realism. Thus a million marriages, say, do not bring into existence a mysterious thing called the ideal of marriage. There is no such thing; it is an abstraction, a romance. There are a million marriages, that is all. Each is different from the rest, each separate, each real. Every marriage must therefore be treated as a special marriage, or a special case, and the couple contracting it must live within its bond (itself suitably modified) or break it according to the dictates of conscience and nature, not according to laws and conventions relating to an ideal which has no existence. The successful marriage is achieved only by the process of trial and error. Everything, in short, should be judged on its merits, and the only fixed rule is that there is no fixed rule. (It is in this sense, by the way, that Shaw is an anarchist, or person who advocates, not absence of government, but government by self-control, from within; in other senses he is not only archistic but archarchistic.) In Shaw's eyes the idealism he found in life and the romanticism he found on the stage had one factor in common: both were false. Describing idealism as 'only a flattering name for romance in ethics and religion,' he is convinced that the tragedy and comedy of life are 'the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our attempts to found our institutions on the ideal suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history.'

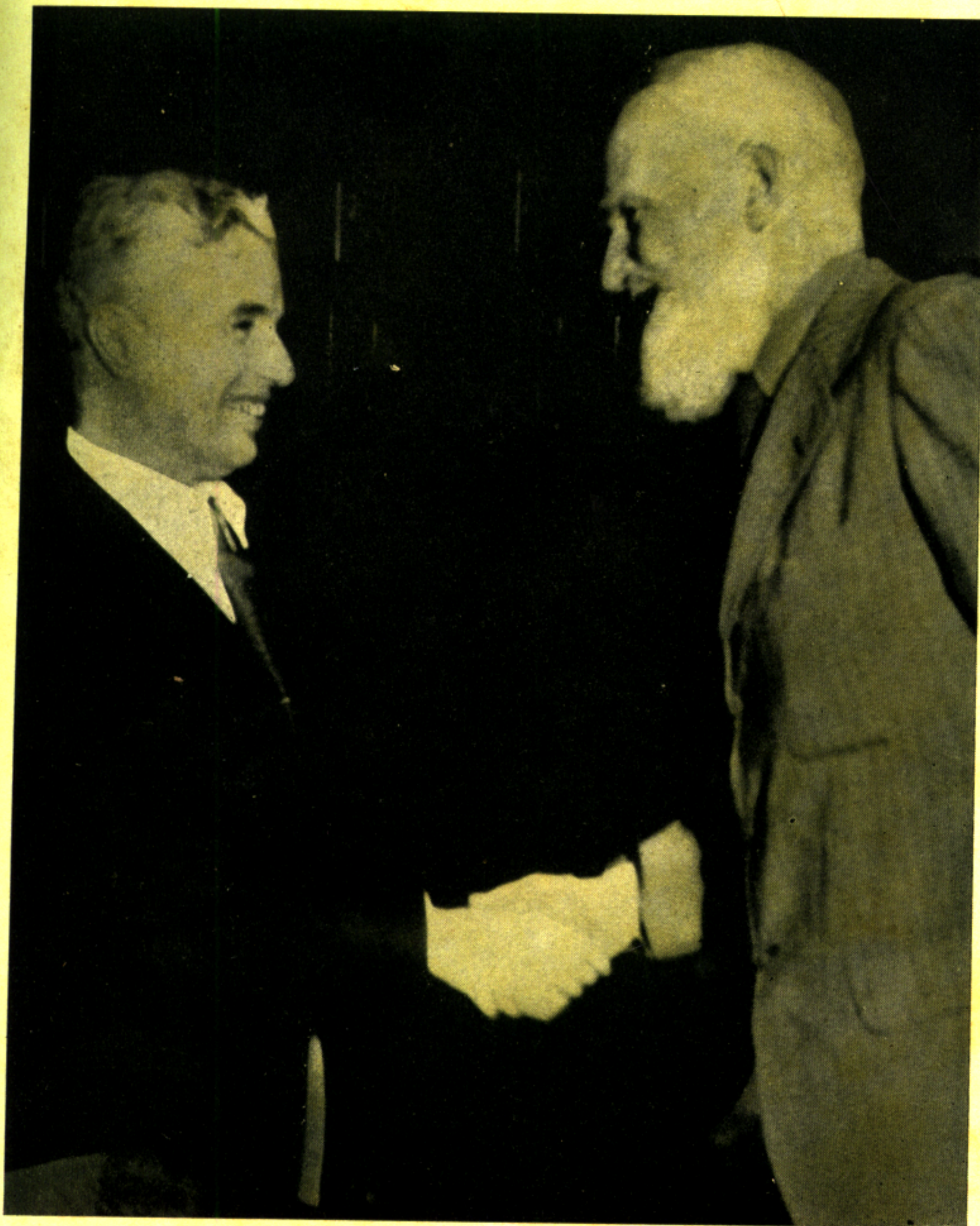
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In this connection it is interesting to note that in 1934, when he paid his first and only visit to America, Shaw spoke as a pioneering scientific natural historian, not as a dramatist or comedian. In other words, for his only lecture in America he chose the subject of political science.

Historical examples of idealism depend for their survival largely on the fact that distance lends enchantment to the view. Shaw attacks idealism by obliterating this distance, a feat he accomplishes by putting his historical characters not under a microscope but under a telescopic lens.

In this way Shaw brings the past before the bar of contemporary judgment, where the heroes whom time and distance have idealized stand stripped, and are seen to be human beings like ourselves. Ancient problems become present problems, and yesterday is made intelligible in the light of to-day. Thus in the popular imagination Napoleon lives encrusted with a hundred years' growth of romance and idealization, until he is either an impossible demigod or an equally impossible ogre: but Shaw's *Man of Destiny* is a very modern practical and understandable human being. In the same way time has romanticized the Holy Inquisition into an assembly of archfiends in human shape: but Shaw's *Inquisitor* is a kindly old gentleman, learned, wise, and experienced, who behaves very like an English Lord Chief Justice. Again, Roman emperors have been swollen by time into monsters of tyranny: but Shaw's *Emperor in Androcles* and *The Lion* behaves no more and no less tyrannically than a Home Secretary or Dictator of to-day. Whether dealing with history or not, Shaw's method is always





KEYSTONE

*Mutual admiration : Charles Chaplin and Bernard Shaw  
meet*





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the same; to him a prize-fighter, for instance, is not a knight-errant whose autograph must be secured at all costs, but 'a disillusioned man of business trying to make money at a certain weight.'

This power of destroying illusions and of robbing history of its glamour is Shaw's most effective weapon for his attack on society. He does not permit us to indulge in the rosy luxury of complacent self-righteousness. Nor does he let us forget that we would have voted for the burning of Joan had we been living in her day, just as we would now be voting for its equivalent had she been living in ours. For all our boast of progress and enlightenment, the modern world has its tortures not a whit less cruel than the old ones, superstitions not a whit less credulous, intolerances not a whit less bigoted, and stupidities not a whit less crass. Our fears and prejudices against the Light still burn the Maid and crucify Christ daily.

But if we are as bad as the so-called villains of history, those villains are no worse than the good men of to-day. It is not the evil done by our handfuls of criminals, which, after all, is easily identifiable and therefore largely preventable, but that done by our armies of good men, by idealists, by society, by vested interests and governments and churches, that is appalling. All such evil is done, of course, in the name of honour and tradition, patriotism and idealism, law and order. We have no right, Shaw declares, 'to regard Annas and Caiaphas as worse men than the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Headmaster of Eton. If Jesus had been indicted in a modern court, he would have been examined by two doctors; found to be



obsessed by a delusion; declared incapable of pleading; and sent to an asylum: that is the whole difference.' To drive home a point of this sort Shaw invariably uses the same technique. He first chooses some character from history, for preference a highly infamous one, then picks out his or her modern counterpart, for preference someone highly respected, brackets them together, and holds up the pair of them as a warning for all time.

As he strips, so he reveals. And in revealing, he brings realities not only to light, but to life. With certain awkward realities, duly embalmed in the pleasant spices of romantic idealism after being supposed long dead, Shaw behaves like a body-snatcher. He explains, of course, that he is really behaving like a body-saver, and that the supposedly dead is really very much alive. Before you can stop him, he will dig up the seeming corpse, strip it of its sweet-smelling cerements, and pump into it the breath of present parallels and modern instances. Whereupon the corpse, surely enough, comes shockingly to life, and all respectable, law-abiding, church-going people are appalled to find it not only alive but still challenging and full of fight. For instance, pious people were shocked when Shaw described the Crucifixion as 'a complete political success.' Nor were they appeased when he explained that he was 'treating the Crucifixion as an ordinary event like Home Rule or the Insurance Act; that is, as a real event which had really happened, instead of a portion of the Church service.' It was all very disturbing, they felt, and highly improper. But, to Shaw's mind, so was the Crucifixion.

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Perhaps one of the principal reasons why people maintain that Shaw is not serious is that they are frightened of where his views would lead them, if once they took him seriously and acted on those views. For the results of such action would undoubtedly be as uncomfortable as those, say, following obedience to such commands as, 'Love one another,' and 'Take no thought for the morrow.' And if there is one thing people dislike it is discomfort, especially discomfort of the mind. Again, if one takes Shaw seriously, but disagrees with him, one must be prepared to refute him in argument, and few of us have time or talent enough to engage in such combat, Shaw being a man mighty in words. The easiest way out, both for those who are afraid they might agree with him and for those who know they disagree with him, is stoutly to deny his capacity to be serious.

It is frequently urged against Shaw as a playwright that all his characters talk like Bernard Shaw. In one sense they do; they all talk the language of reality. And it is the importance Shaw attaches to reality that makes, perhaps more than anything else, the answer to the question 'Is Bernard Shaw Serious?' an emphatic and undoubting 'Yes.' For the most serious and exciting thing in life to Bernard Shaw is the reality of life, past, present, and future. The witty playwright, as well as the Puritan critic, finds that 'life is real, life is earnest.'

## CHAPTER X

### A RELIGIOUS MAN

It would be incorrect to suppose Bernard Shaw irreligious simply because he declared himself an atheist before the Shelley Society as a young man, or because he declines to go to church on Sunday: as incorrect as to suppose that an army recruit who puts down C. of E. in the religion column of his enlistment papers is necessarily religious. The recruit sure to be religious in some degree is the one with the temerity to write himself down an atheist; for that would show that he had at least wrestled with God enough to deny Him, and had not merely taken Him for granted or ignored Him. It would show, too, that he had the spiritual vitality, as he looked at the world and the universe beyond it, at least to face the eternal question, 'What the devil does it all mean?' even if he could find only a negative answer.

Behind every fight is a faith, and the faith behind Shaw's fight is a fervent belief in what he calls Creative Evolution. His creed is briefly this. There is a spiritual power in the universe; call it the Life Force. About its origin we know nothing. It is neither all-powerful nor all-knowing, but strives to become both through its own creations. It goes slowly forward by a process of trial and error. Man is the latest trial. He may be an error. But he is not a base accident of nature.

Now Darwin, or rather the metaphysicians and philosophers who took notice of Darwin's obser-



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ventions in the field of natural history, concluded that man *was* a base accident of nature. Strangely enough, they came to this conclusion with the greatest pleasure and relief. To find the explanation of this surprising attitude, and to learn how Bernard Shaw, one-time atheist, came to embrace Creative Evolution as his faith, a short survey of the history of the general idea of evolution must be made.

It was the fashion when Shaw was a young man for the more daringly advanced free-thinkers to offer to stand up, their watches in their hands, and challenge God to prove His existence by striking them dead within five minutes. Shaw, who had given up saying his prayers long before he left Ireland because he had decided that he could no longer be intellectually honest with himself if he continued them, was of this enterprising band. Duly he stood up and took out his watch, thereby proving himself once for all an essentially religious man. For religion, so often confused with emotional crises and ecstatic experiences commonly arising from the unsatisfied yearnings of sex, is, by definition, a bending back. It is a passionate desire to bend oneself back to, or relate oneself to, the universe about one. It is the urge to trace one's spiritual connections, to discover one's spiritual roots. Only the irreligious are content to be rootless; and proudly but vainly they go through life trying to be spiritually sufficient to themselves. Religious people, on the other hand, want to feel that they are parts of a whole; not only members one of another, but all children of the same eternal Father.

When you give God five minutes in which to

strike you dead, you are not challenging God, of course, but only a conception of Him. For God is only a name we give to the Permanent Reality that lies hidden behind the seeming reality of life, behind the seeming existence of matter that passes away, and beyond the ridiculously short range of our present apprehensions and senses. But although we can never on earth fully apprehend God, yet out of the necessity of our souls' hunger we are always trying to, with the result that our conception, or portrait, while a very poor likeness of God, is a very good likeness of ourselves. And as we change, so our picture of God changes, man outgrowing the pictures as a boy outgrows his clothes. God does not change; only our picture of Him changes, and in time the God of our fathers is no longer good enough for us; nor, sometimes, bad enough. When men are at war, for instance, God at once becomes the God of battles, a tribal partisan. By their gods ye shall know them. Always the picture is painted in man's image. That is why we have never been able to comprehend, much less live up to, St John's affirmation that God is a Spirit, or, as the Church of England's Articles of Religion put it, that God is 'without body, parts, or passions.' Burdened with these ourselves, we cannot help putting them into the picture although we know quite well they have no place there. The difficulty, religiously speaking, of bending our three-dimensional selves back to a God of  $\infty$  dimensions or perhaps no dimensions at all, is such that it is unlikely that our portrait of God will bear any recognizable resemblance to the original, until man also is wholly Spirit.

The picture which Bernard Shaw and others offered to defy was the popular one of an anthropomorphic God with plenty of parts and passions. God, in short, was still Jehovah, that past-master in wrath and vengeance; or, as Shaw describes him, 'a thundering, earthquaking, famine striking, pestilence launching, blinding, deafening, killing, destructively omnipotent Bogey Man.' Simultaneous belief in an all-loving Father with an all-loving Son was by no means so impossible as it seems, especially on Sundays and when the sun shone, because although people thought about these things they thought about them vaguely, rarely reaching any logical conclusion. Rather than bear the burden of thorough thought, with its possible reward of nothing but a sterile atheism or agnosticism, people believed anything they were told to believe, provided it was respectable and fashionable and did not interfere with their conduct on weekdays. And behind this inert mass of loose thinking, and lack of thinking, was the far from inert idea that pain and poverty, cruelty and suffering, deformity and misfortune were all part of God's bounty, bestowed lovingly for their unfortunate recipients' good. In this belief did fathers beat their children and schoolmasters their pupils, and, taking their cue from the Bogey Man, insist that they hurt themselves more than their victims. In this belief, too, even church and industry were able to shake hands upon the proposition that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds, so that it was not out of place for the Reverend J. Townsend, for instance, to object to the relief of the poor because it 'destroyed the harmony and



beauty, the symmetry and order of that system which God and Nature have established in the world.' He added: 'Hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but, as the most natural motive to industry, calls forth the most powerful exertions.'

The use of the past tense in the preceding paragraph is not intended to flatter the twentieth century at the expense of the nineteenth, or to imply the dethronement of Jehovah. He exists, of course, in countless homes to-day. People, for example, who refuse to allow their children to be operated on for hare-lip on the ground that what God has deformed must not be re-formed, believe in Him; people who regard earthquakes and shipwrecks and similar calamities as the instruments of Divine punishment, believe in Him; people who talk about tempting Providence, and mean it, believe in Him; just as do those who pray for rain, as though God withheld water from the earth in order to show off His omnipotence, or had forgotten to turn on some celestial shower-tap and needed to be reminded and besought.

So much for the majority, in all ages. The minority, on the other hand, could find no peace of mind until they had satisfied both their intellects and consciences by thinking out this problem of God to as near its end as their experience and reasoning would take them. To such, the kind of sentiment expressed by Mr Townsend was blasphemy against all decency and goodness, and they felt it impossible not to agree with Shelley that God was an Almighty Fiend. For coining so apt and pungent an expression, by the way, the poet was asked to remove himself from Oxford.

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It was the Almighty Fiend that Shaw and other free - thinkers offered to challenge. And it was from the Almighty Fiend that Darwin rescued them intellectually. For the great naturalist's *Origin of Species* (published in 1859 when Bernard Shaw was three years old) showed that the development and survival of life on this planet, as well as all the happenings attendant thereon, could be explained without the help or hindrance of any God at all. Darwin's theory in brief, if we use the familiar illustration of the giraffe, was that if your neck was not long enough to reach your food, you died. That (with all its implications) and no more was Darwin's discovery. If your neck is too short, you pass away as simply and quickly as hundreds of thousands of species must have passed away during the aeons of the earth's existence. The earth sustains only those forms of life which happen to suit it. Blind, accidental, and automatic, the process needs no intervention by any God whatsoever to make it work. Natural, or Circumstantial, Selection, as it was called, was a grim theory, but it held water. Best of all, it banished the Almighty Fiend. For the Fiendish picture of God had become more impossible and undesirable than ever. Not only was the Fiend undesirable from the humane point of view as a cruel and vindictive God, but in an age of science, which required for the exactness of its measurements and reasoning a background of, above all things, orderliness, an omnipotent Fiend who could stop the sun in the valley of Ajalon while his henchmen won a battle for him, and could therefore presumably strike a man dead in five minutes if he wanted to, loomed larger and

larger as a disorderly and capricious God. In short, he was an unscientific God: and, as such, incredible.

Great was the relief when Darwin showed that the world could do without the Fiend. As Shaw puts it, there was a sort of 'scientific mafficking.' It was Samuel Butler who first raised his hand to quell the tumult of joy. He asked whether people were not being somewhat premature in their rejoicing. Darwin, he declared, had 'banished Mind from the universe.' Sobered, men found that it was so. In banishing the Fiend they had banished everything that made life worth living; all love, all decency, all hope, all moral purpose, and all will, except the blind brute will to eat. Life shrivelled into a mean chapter of senseless accidents. Design gave place to chaos, shape to an empty void, and light to darkness. That glib phrase, 'Survival of the Fittest,' turned out on examination to be the survival of the cunningest, the brawniest, and the greediest. Darwin and his followers had indeed emptied out the baby with the bath-water. It was as though men had rushed down a steep place in a delirium of joy at their delivery from the Almighty Fiend, and had been brought up short by the realization that they were standing on the brink of a bottomless pit. In it they saw neither salvation nor even damnation, neither free will nor determination, but only no will and a black fatalism. Recoiling from the sight as from a brutal blasphemy, Shaw was moved to fervent protest. If Circumstantial Selection is a truth of science and the meaning of life, then, he declared, 'the stars of heaven, the showers and dew,



the winter and summer, the fire and heat, the mountains and hills, may no longer be called on to exalt the Lord with us by praise: their work is to modify all things by blindly starving and murdering everything that is not lucky enough to survive in the universal struggle for hogwash.'

'Thus,' he continues, 'did the neck of the giraffe reach out across the whole heavens and make men believe that what they saw there was the gloaming of the gods.' Was there no escape from the dreadful dilemma, one horn of which was the acceptance of a life more futile than death, and the other the Fiend's recall and re-enthronement? Which was worse, a cruel God with a vindictive purpose and a capricious will, or no God and no purpose and no will? Was there no other escape, no second alternative? There was.

The idea of evolution, far from being introduced by Darwin, was as old as Aristotle when he classed together as blood relations all animals with backbones; indeed older, for every stock-breeder, pigeon-fancier, and gardener had practised evolution every time they had tried to improve the strain of their flocks and herds or to produce a new variety of vegetable or flower. But it was only towards the end of the eighteenth century that evolution, with the help of the microscope, became incontrovertible as a scientific fact, and it was upon this firm foundation that metaphysicians began to build evolution into a philosophy in the nineteenth century, and atheists and free-thinkers to find in it a religion and a faith. Thus in 1830 Goethe divined that all creatures had proceeded from a common stock, and that they had been differentiated by their various

environments; and none other than Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus, had written: 'The world has been evolved, not created: it has arisen little by little from a small beginning, and has increased through the activity of the elemental forces embodied in itself, and so has grown rather than come into being at an almighty word.' So far, it is the How; the Why is missing. It was found by Lamarck, a French soldier of Napoleon's day. Like Darwin who followed him half a century later, Lamarck was concerned not so much with adding to the evidential facts of evolution as with trying to explain why they occurred; and, like Darwin's, his explanation was a very simple one. It was nothing more, but nothing less, than that all living organisms changed *because they wanted to*. The giraffe had grown his neck by willing it. Old organs could be and had been discarded because their owners had no longer any use for them, just as new organs could be and had been developed because they were wanted and needed. All that was necessary was a passionate desire for the change, and a continuous willing for it until it was effected.

Lamarck did not banish Mind from the universe. On the contrary, he invested Life with it. Every process of life, every tissue of life, every cell he invested with will, purpose, design, and hope. The difference between Lamarckianism and Darwinism is the difference between light and darkness, between life and death, between good and evil. For Lamarck left man his soul. More than that, he gave a soul to every living thing. Where there is life there is will, and where there's a will there's a way. It was at the flame of this old proverb,

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which embodies all that a layman need know of Lamarckianism, that Shaw and the other Vitalists kept the torch of life and hope alight when Darwinism threatened to extinguish it. In the ensuing battle between the combatants, who called themselves Neo-Lamarckians and Neo-Darwinians, Bernard Shaw took an active part, and the Neo-Darwinians were chased from the field pursued by Shavian invective. To-day the smoke has cleared, and the Neo-Lamarckian calls himself a Creative Evolutionist.

So much for a branch of Victorian history. As a religion, Creative Evolution appeals to Shaw because it is intellectually credible. It appeals to him, too, because it is scientific. For him there is no rift between religion and science, Creative Evolution being a solvent for both. It does not explain everything, it is true; if it did, the Creative Evolutionist would be omniscient, and not even the Life Force is that. For we must remember that the Life Force, which by definition is the spiritual power behind evolution, moves forward stumblingly, gropingly, and slowly, by fits and starts between long intervals of gestation and quiescence, and cannot exceed the pace of its own creations, which are its only instruments of expression. 'If we could only realize,' Shaw remarks, 'that though the Life Force supplies us with its own purpose it has no other brains to work with than those it has painfully and imperfectly evolved in our heads, the peoples of the earth would learn some pity for their gods.' Neither omniscient nor omnipotent, the Life Force proceeds by trial and error. It is not sightless so much as



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moving in darkness, with the result that it often hits its head, turns up blind alleys, and generally makes mistakes.

Looked at in this way, many problems become understandable, if not immediately soluble: the problem of evil, for example. For if all our crimes and cruelties and calamities are in truth errors, or gropings, or unintentional accidents, then all malice is banished from the universe. The Mind may be slow and dull and clumsy, but at least it is not malicious, and what we call evils are seen only as happenings which the Life Force regrets as much as we do, but which it cannot prevent until we help it to prevent them, since we and it are one, indivisibly embarked in a co-operative alliance on the same long, adventurous, and untrod journey. Similarly pain and suffering, though still real, can perhaps be borne with less revulsion and anger if we can be sure that they are not deliberately inflicted as pious punishments by an Almighty Schoolmaster, or out of sheer lust for cruelty by an Almighty Fiend.

Just as Creative Evolution satisfies Shaw because it can explain such problems as those of sin and suffering without resort to evasion or dogma, and without doing violence to his intelligence, so it also satisfies his religious urge to relate himself to all living things by making him a member 'of a fellowship in which we are all equal and members one of another before the judgment seat of our common father.' If these words of Shaw's are reminiscent of religions other than Creative Evolution, he is quick to point out that there is no question of a new religion, but only of 'redistilling





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*Above : Bernard Shaw at his country home at Ayot St Lawrence  
in Hertfordshire*

*Below : 'It amuses me to talk to animals in a sort of jargon  
I have invented for them'*







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the eternal spirit of religion and thus extricating it from the sludgy residue of temporalities and legends that are making belief impossible, though they are the stock-in-trade of all the Churches and all the schools.' There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.

What, then, is Bernard Shaw's attitude to Jesus? Is he a Christian? That depends on what we mean by Christian. Nietzsche, for instance, held that there had been only one Christian, and that He had died on the Cross. But if by Christian we mean someone who is an active member of one or other of the established churches or denominational sects of Christendom, the answer is that Shaw is not such a person. He cannot honestly subscribe either to the articles or to the theology of any established religion, Christian or otherwise; nor has he any use for priests or ministers in their professional capacity, being, like Voltaire, so religious that he is anti-clerical. In particular, he has a horror of the idea that his sins can be atoned for by anybody but himself, a man's sin clinging to him, according to Shaw's way of thinking, until he himself throws it off by overcoming the desire to sin. Thus the doctrine of the Atonement is abhorrent to Shaw, and he thinks that it leads away from the Christianity of Christ to what he calls the Crosstianity of Christendom. He blames St Paul for developing the doctrine of vicarious atonement, declaring that 'to this day Pauline Christianity is, and owes its enormous vogue to being, a premium on sin.' Indeed, Shaw blames St Paul for most things. If Jesus is Christianity's hero, St Paul is the villain who bound the hero hand and foot with multiple

threads of doctrine and theology; for, according to Shaw, there has 'never been a more monstrous imposition perpetrated than the imposition of the limitations of Paul's soul upon the soul of Jesus.'

As regards Jesus Himself, Shaw sees in Him a divinely inspired prophet and teacher, to whom, as an economist, the world had better listen before it is too late. But he thinks that St Peter's remark about His being the Son of God turned His head to the point of self-deception. On the other hand, he says that a Shavian or any one else may become a follower of Jesus, and therefore call himself a Jesuit or even a Christian, 'if he holds, as the strictest Secularist quite legitimately may, that all prophets are inspired, and all men with missions, *Christs*.' And if Bernard Shaw were asked: 'Are you a member with us in Christ?' I think he would answer: 'Yes: we are all of us vehicles for the Life Force.'

Gilbert Chesterton, who was a Roman Catholic by conversion, used to scoff gently at Shaw's Life-Force by asking how on earth a man could worship a hyphen. But there are many ways of worshipping, and until the Kingdom of God is established, the most acceptable way, Bernard Shaw would say, is to labour with God (or whatever you like to call Him) and help to build it, instead of dawdling in the courts of ritualistic praise and indulging the emotions. God is busy; and they that worship Him must worship Him by being busy with Him. The Life Force needs labourers badly, for without them it cannot work at all. Moreover, even when it and they do work together, it is no wiser and no quicker than they. It and its creations, the power

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and the instruments, driver and driven, master and workmen, God and His children, are all equal in a communism of knowledge and ignorance, in a bond of adventure, effort, trial, error, and hope. It is as if an employer were to take his workers into his confidence, ask their advice, and generally throw himself on their mercy. The workers are flattered, and at once respond to their added responsibility by determining not to let 'the governor' down. Thus the Kingdom of God becomes a co-operative enterprise conducted on modern lines, with the workers part-owners. The Kingdom of God is theirs as well as God's, and God cannot build it without their help and work. Such a religious layout appeals strongly to Bernard Shaw, because he is always anxious to help, advise, and assume responsibility. Moreover, he likes the idea of being an active partner in a going concern, instead of being told to believe certain things and to act in certain ways under threat of punishment for failure to do so.

The Life Force has neither the time nor the intelligence to mete out rewards and punishments: if it had, it would doubtless prohibit them as foolish. The reward of the Kingdom of God is the building of it: that is heaven. And there is no punishment except that of not being called upon to build it, no hell except the hell of being passed over and left with nothing to do but enjoy yourself. The doing and the daring, the being and becoming, these are the delights of heaven, just as having nothing to do and being content are the tortures of a hell where the flames do not even burn you.



But the choice is not between heaven and hell, but between survival and obliteration. For do not let us imagine that the Life Force cannot do without us. If we fail it, it will find other partners for the work of pressing forward its dim but mighty purpose. If man clings to his errors and denies the light, that is not the end of the Life Force, or of hope: it is the end only of man. Man, as we know him, will be scrapped, and something else tried. 'The power that produced Man when the monkey was not up to the mark, can produce a higher creature than Man if Man does not come up to the mark. What it means is that if Man is to be saved, Man must save himself. There seems no compelling reason why he should be saved. He is by no means an ideal creature. At his present best many of his ways are so unpleasant that they are unmentionable in polite society, and so painful that he is compelled to pretend that pain is often a good. Nature holds no brief for the human experiment: it must stand or fall by its results. If Man will not serve, Nature will try another experiment.'

How can Man serve? By keeping his body fit; it may be a poor body, but it is the only one he has, so he may as well keep it bright and clean: by keeping his mind, too, bright and clean: by doing, and daring, and being curious: by being tolerant of novelty, and by suspecting heresy of truth.

It is not easy to keep the mind bright and clean if it is cluttered up with old customs and superstitions. The Life Force does not inhabit lumber rooms. The Bible, for instance, is full of pictures of God which have served their turn, and which

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show how God reveals Himself to men according to their capacity to understand Him. In *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*, Shaw takes us through the Bible like a guide taking visitors through a picture gallery, pointing out on the walls the successive revelations of God from the 'Omnipotent Bogey Man, maker of night and day and sun and moon, of the four seasons and their miracle of seed and harvest, to a braver idealization of a benevolent sage, a just judge, and affectionate father.' To-day, when we are pleased to call man adolescent, Shaw would hang another picture of God on the walls and extend the revelation to 'the incorporeal word that never becomes flesh, at which point modern science and philosophy take up the problem with its *Vis Naturae*, its *Elan Vital*, its Life Force, its Evolutionary Appetite, its still more abstract Categorical Imperative, and what not.' Shaw's point is that there is not room in our minds for all the old pictures of God if we persist in looking on them as pictures of the living God. They are nothing of the kind, he insists, all but one being pictures of dead gods; not false gods, but *Has Beens*. The picture of the living God is the latest picture which we can appreciate and understand. The rest we must either sweep away; or, if we keep them, we must look on them as nothing more than legends, or interesting records, or historical relics, and put them into a museum of evolutionary exhibits.

Bernard Shaw pretends not to be certain of the meaning of his tale of the Black Girl. Its moral, however, seems clear. It is surely that we should take a lesson from the bees and the clover. When

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a bee lights on a clover he finds it divided into many dozens of smaller flowers, or florets; and as he drains a floret of its honey, so he invariably turns it down, thus indicating for the benefit of all other visiting bees that all the downward pointing florets, once useful and honeyed, are now empty, finished, done with, and as good as dead. What the bee does instinctively with the clover's florets Shaw would have us do deliberately with our beliefs. Putting the matter colloquially, he warns us to throw out our dirty water before we take in fresh.

The difficulty of worshipping anything so apparently fumbling and dumb, so blind and stupid as the Life Force, and of retaining our self-respect while paying it allegiance, is mitigated when we remember two axioms: first, that man always makes God in his own image, so that the cap fits, for man too is fumbling and stupid; and second, that in every religion what man worships is not God, but only such revelation of Him as is suited to man's earthly plane. Sensing this kind of difficulty, Shaw refrains from omniscience and offers his creed as 'nothing more than another provisional hypothesis.' All provisional hypotheses may be illusions, he adds, 'but if they conduce to beneficial conduct they must be inculcated and acted on by governments until better ones arrive.' So long as Shaw is reasonably satisfied that he has got hold of the right end of the stick, he is not dismayed if he cannot see the other end of it. After all, the stick is eternally long.

But he is immensely curious about what is there. Indeed, Shaw is immensely curious about every-



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thing, and declares that if he had been Adam he would have swallowed every apple on the tree out of sheer curiosity and thirst for knowledge the moment its owner's back was turned, and not left one for Eve. Curiosity is the note on which Shaw ends *Back to Methuselah*, the long pentateuch of his faith in parable form: curiosity, one of the notes in the octave of Life. The final passage, soaring into the borderland where prose and poetry meet, is remarkable for having left Joey the Clown on the ground. It is therefore worth quoting. The speaker is the mythological Lilith, who was before Adam and Eve, and she is speaking of the acceptance by these mortals of the burden of eternal life.

'Best of all, they are still not satisfied: the impulse I gave them in that day when I sundered myself in twain and launched Man and Woman on the earth still urges them: after passing a million goals they press on to the redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force. And though all that they have done seems but the first hour of the infinite work of creation, yet I will not supersede them until they have forded this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit, and disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it. I can wait: waiting and patience mean nothing to the eternal. I gave the woman the greatest of gifts: curiosity. By that her seed has been saved from my wrath; for I also am curious; and I have always waited to see what they will do to-morrow. Let them feed that appetite well for me. I say, let them dread, of all things, stagnation; for from

the moment, I, Lilith, lose hope and faith in them, they are doomed. In that hope and faith I have let them live for a moment; and in that moment I have spared them many times. But mightier creatures than they have killed hope and faith, and perished from the earth; and I may not spare them for ever. I am Lilith; I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy Matter to obey a living soul. But in enslaving Life's enemy I made him Life's master; for that is the end of all slavery; and now I shall see the slave set free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life and no matter.'

The play draws to its close. Still the voice of Lilith is heard. 'Of Life only there is no end; and though of its million starry mansions many are empty and many still unbuilt, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert, my seed shall one day fill it and master its matter to the uttermost confines. And for what is beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond.'

As the curtain slowly falls, one can almost hear the roll of cosmic drums.

The Life Force is too nebulous and impersonal a conception of God to be embraced as a religion by many. But can we lightly reject Shaw's description of religion as the desire to be an instrument of a Purpose which far transcends one's personal self and which, imbuing all past creation and all creation to come, fills the spheres with its breath? Is he not appealing to the religious urge in man when he invites us to offer ourselves humbly and joyously for ravishment by the Life Force? 'This,' cries

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his Don Juan, 'is the true joy of life; the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrapheap; the being a force of nature, instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.' To pull and push and strive forward, gropingly, but as best we may, away from matter and towards spirit, with conscience and curiosity for guides: this is the ecstasy of Creative Evolution.



## CHAPTER XI

### ECONOMIST

IN the heart of Dorset, where the quiet of the English countryside still abides like an evening hymn, lies Tolpuddle. Just before Queen Victoria came to the throne this little village produced a handful of men who later became famous as the Tolpuddle Martyrs. They were agricultural labourers, and they had tried to make life a little less precarious by forming a trade union, and in consequence had been arrested, unfairly tried, and finally deported. At the centenary of their martyrdom, Bernard Shaw was asked to write a few lines to introduce the volume recording their history. He wrote tersely to the effect that he had no sympathy for martyrs and no use for people who tried to alleviate poverty, because if poverty was made bearable it would be borne. The only thing to do with poverty was to abolish it.

The brutality of such remarks on such an occasion served Shaw's purpose; which was, to divest the centenary of sentimentality, and to make his views on the subject of poverty clear for all occasions. Flat, uncompromising condemnation of poverty is perhaps Shaw's greatest contribution to economic thought. At a meeting he once shocked his colleagues who were trying to pass a motion that every workman should have three pounds a week, by saying that he was interested only in workmen with thirty pounds a week. He is not interested in Poor Laws: only in abolishing the

poor. Far from wanting the poor always with him, he would abolish them by the simple expedient of making them rich. 'Poverty,' he says, 'should be neither pitied as an inevitable misfortune, nor tolerated as a just retribution for misconduct, but resolutely stamped out and prevented from recurring as a disease fatal to society.'

Since poverty is a negative state, perhaps it would be better to say that Shaw's great contribution to economics is his insistence on the importance of money. 'The universal regard for money is the one hopeful fact in our civilization, the one sound spot in our social conscience. Money is the most important thing in the world. It represents health, strength, honour, generosity, and beauty as conspicuously and undeniably as the want of it represents illness, weakness, disgrace, meanness, and ugliness. Not the least of its virtues is that it destroys base people as certainly as it fortifies and dignifies noble people. It is only when it is cheapened to worthlessness for some, and made impossibly dear to others, that it becomes a curse. In short, it is a curse only in such foolish conditions that life itself is a curse. For the two things are inseparable: money is the counter that enables life to be distributed socially: it *is* life as truly as sovereigns and banknotes are money.' This is splendid mental food for children growing up to be citizens in an age of potential plenty; and, did I own a school or factory, I would hang framed copies of this nobly realistic creed in letters of gold about the place, even if I had to displace such efficiency slogans as Time is Money and Get Out This Means You. Recognition of the importance

of money is the basis of all sound and successful personal and national morality, and every teacher and twaddler who denies this or suppresses it, Shaw insists, is an enemy of life.

No one has made clearer than Bernard Shaw the closeness of the bond between life and money. The tragedy of the medical profession, for instance, what is it but that doctors are forced to prescribe medicine for patients whose real need is more money? How can a nation breed healthily, let alone live healthily, when according to Sir John Orr one quarter of it lives in a chronic state of malnutrition? Shaw, it is good to note, is not a member of the Change of Heart School. Change the diet, change the system, he implies, and the heart will take care of itself. If we want healthy children we must have healthy parents, and parents cannot be healthy unless they are also wealthy; and we cannot have healthy and wealthy parents except in healthy and wealthy houses and towns, and for these we must have healthy and wealthy countries. 'The crying need of the nation is not for better morals, cheaper bread, temperance, liberty, culture, redemption of fallen sisters and erring brothers, nor the grace, love, and fellowship of the Trinity, but simply for enough money. And the evil to be attacked is not sin, suffering, greed, priestcraft, kingcraft, demagoguery, monopoly, ignorance, drink, war, pestilence, nor any other of the scapegoats which reformers sacrifice, but simply poverty.'

It is easy to talk, of course, and easier still to write. Yet to-day nothing needs reiteration so much as the simple, obvious truths. Bad news we believe at the first whisper; it is good news that



we cannot take in. In these days above all others, when the bread of affliction is still regarded as a fit and proper diet for a world physically capable of producing such abundance that, figuratively speaking, it is a world not flowing but overflowing with milk and honey; when coffee is thrown into the sea, cattle burnt, wheat used as fuel, milk poured down the drains, cotton ploughed back into the earth, and the bounty of nature in general regarded as a calamity of the first magnitude; and when, moreover, all these things are done, not secretly or in shame or in defiance of the law, but openly and virtuously and systematically in one long desperate attempt to keep plastered together a money system that is cracked: then, anything and everything that condemns this blasphemous destruction, turns a searchlight on to money, and insists on man's inalienable right to the vast wealth under his nose, is of value. For to some people, many of them influential, poverty still has her charms, and the Reverend Townsend, previously quoted, has his counterparts to-day, though if they value their skins they are less outspoken. Indeed, so inured are we to the idea of poverty as the normal state to which it has pleased God to call us, that the first reaction of an intelligent friend, glancing over my shoulder at the above quotations from Shaw, was to ask, quite sincerely: 'I suppose he's trying to be funny?'

Necessary, therefore, is Shaw's insistence that 'until the fear of bodily want is forgotten as completely as the fear of wolves already is in civilized capitals, we shall never have a decent social life.' He knows that there is no reason why this fear

should not be banished. He knows that the physical machinery for the production of all reasonable bodily wants is already in being, thanks to man's inventive genius, and that nothing is needed now but an intelligent piece of economic machinery to enable that productive machinery to work. He knows that the problem of production is solved, and that the only problem left is the problem of consumption, which, except in the case of thieves, is a money problem. If production gives us ugly things, that is not the fault of production but of taste; if it gives us cheap and nasty things, that again is not the fault of production but of lack of money; and if it gives us destructive and deathly things, as at present, that too is because the root cause of war is an economic one. About the powers of production as such, however, there can be no question. By harnessing solar energy, man has turned nature into a cornucopia. That is the vision which has become fact. And nothing is more important than constant assertion of that fact, with the insistence, by every means in our power, that our economic system shall be so amended that the ✓ cornucopia be enabled to pour out the materials of life instead of death.

The supply of man's bodily needs should by now have begun to work as automatically as the supply of air to his lungs. His economic system should be working as smoothly and unobtrusively as his respiratory system. We are conscious of our breathing apparatus only when it goes wrong, and the world to-day is like a man with chronic asthma. Its economic apparatus has gone so appallingly wrong that internationally, nationally, and indi-

vidually, men all the time are conscious of money in the sense of its insufficiency. Never have people suffered from money worries, insecurity, and the grinding struggle for existence as they are suffering in this century of disgrace. And that this suffering increases the more loudly Plenty knocks at the door, so that, despite that knocking, we still behave like so many heaps of agonizing maggots struggling with one another for scraps of food, can be interpreted, I say, only as an indictment of the economic system which refuses to open that door.

Salutary, too, are Shaw's ideas on the subject of work, though tinged perhaps too heavily with the modern Puritanism which reserves for work the sanctity formerly bestowed upon the body. Even so, while stipulating that work is 'a prime necessity of a tolerable existence,' Bernard Shaw realizes that work, in the sense of labouring for hire, becomes an intolerable curse when men are forced to overwork. The dynamic element in man will always make him work in the sense of being active, just as pride will always make him resent working like a slave. Only the overworked think of heaven as a perpetual holiday: if people were habitually underworked they would think of it as a twenty-four-hour shift. In short, as Shaw says: 'There is no end to the astonishing things that may happen when the curse of Adam first becomes a blessing and then an incurable habit.' The opportunity to make work a blessing for all instead of a curse to most, is vouchsafed to man to-day for the first time in the known history of the world: for, whilst the menial labour of providing the material supplies of life are carried out to-day as they were in previous civilizations,

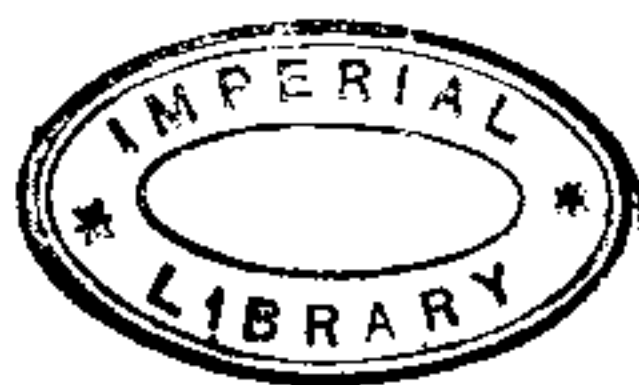


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by slaves, to-day the slaves can be, if we wish, not human ones at all, as they were in Egypt, Rome, and Greece, but mechanical ones which can work efficiently for twenty-four hours a day, rarely go sick or on strike, and have no aspirations to godhead.

We now come to the keystone which holds together the whole arch of Shaw's economic thought. For his opinions about money, poverty, and work are, after all, only gloriously and emphatically stated affirmations of what in an age of abundance should have been obvious long ago. His keystone is more than this: it is the affirmation of a principle. Shaw calls attention to it a great number of times, using all sorts of homely metaphors and similes to impress it on our minds. For instance, he asks: 'Are you pulling your weight in the social boat?' Perhaps the most dogmatic and comprehensive of all his descriptions of this keystone is the following: 'The most important simple fundamental economic truth to impress on a child in complicated civilizations like ours is the truth that whoever consumes goods or services without producing by personal effort the equivalent of what he or she consumes, inflicts on the community precisely the same injury as a thief, and would, in any honest state, be treated as a thief, however full his or her pockets might be of money made by other people.'

One may note in passing that Shaw means money *earned* by other people, for the only makers of money, of course, are the Master of the Royal Mint and the banking system, and if any one else is caught making money he becomes His Majesty's guest for an inconveniently long period. I suppose the mis-







TOPICAL PRESS



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*Above : South Africa. G. B. S. about to fly  
Below : Shaw listens to a record of his own voice*



leading phrase about 'making money' is in such common use because so many people come by money without earning it. But this is by the way, and Shaw's main meaning is clear. He means, briefly, that no one must take out of the common stockpot more than he puts in. Indeed, he means more, adding that people must put in not only the equivalent of what they take out but, also, 'a surplus sufficient to provide for their superannuation and pay back the debt due to their nurture.'

How reasonable, one thinks, how just, how fair! It seems a four-square proposition. And nobody but an anti-social maniac would disagree with its underlying idea that everything in life is conditional. We can put our hands into the common stockpot only on conditions. The stockpot is not free, any more than anything in life is free. There is a price for everything, the price being the fulfilment of conditions. At no time are we entirely free, and when Rousseau said that man was born free, Rousseau was wrong. Even before he is born, man is struggling against, and in the end mutely accepting, conditions for survival in his mother's womb, just as he accepts, far from mutely, further conditions as soon as he is born. When he is grown sufficiently to be able to think for himself, he still must accept conditions; if he refuses, he becomes socially intolerable and is dealt with accordingly. The imposition of conditions by society and their fulfilment by its citizens are the warp and woof which hold society together and enable it to weave its pattern of civilization. Such reflections, however, are not peculiar to Socialists, and Shaw's keystone is no more socialistic than,

say, the feudal system, under which men enjoyed the protection of their lord on condition that they fought for him. Life itself being conditional, they are simply matters of vital common sense.

So far so good. Ethically and vitally, the keystone is plumb. Examined with the technical instruments of economics, however, it is found not to fit quite so snugly into the modern order of things as at first appeared. For (as it would be necessary to explain at some length if this were a book on economics) the common stockpot does not contain, as Shaw implies, only the contributions and productive efforts of human beings. It contains a great deal more. A steadily increasing amount of its contents is contributed by no human beings at all, however hardworking, but by the wholly inhuman and inanimate agency we call the machine. To put the matter as untechnically as possible, the wealth—*wealth*, mind: not money—produced by so many men in so many days with the help of modern power plant and process, is greater than the wealth which would have been produced if the same number of men had worked the same number of days separately, without that help. Obvious as this fact is, its vital implications, judging by the world's economic practices, are far from obvious.

Actually, of course, the majority of modern products are now so complex that no amount of individual labour could produce them. Speaking of industry as a whole, production by the individual is a thing of the past. The ancient Saxon law by which no man could be deprived of the tools of his trade ceases to have much meaning under

modern conditions and, like so many cherished notions, must be discarded; for the modern workman's tools are in the factory, welded into its giant mechanisms. No single workman makes, or can make, a motor-car, for instance, or a pair of silk stockings, or a gramophone. Instead, a vast number of men associate together to produce such things, pooling their resources, some, for instance, contributing their money, others their skill, or knowledge, or organizing ability. Now the results of this association are manifold, some of them recognized and some not. Among the recognized results are the product itself, employment, circulation of money, and, with luck and good management, financial profit; while among the hitherto unrecognized results, by far the most important is the highly satisfactory by-product which modern economists call *the unearned increment of association*. Increment means increase, and this increase is an increase, quite literally, of wealth. Strictly speaking, the increment is not unearned: for in one sense it is earned by the machine with the expenditure of its energy and the sweat and thunder of its furnaces and dynamos (and luckily for us the machine has no desire to claim what it earns); and in another sense it is earned by men, in virtue of their being creatures sensible enough to co-operate, and clever enough to harness solar energy.

To return to our stockpot, then, the amount of wealth in it is always greater than the amount put in by individuals. The difference between these two amounts is the wealth put into the stockpot by the machine. An illustration will help us to grasp this revolutionary theory. For simplicity's



sake let us imagine America the only country and wheat-growing the only industry. Then let us consider Professor Soddy's estimate that with the help of modern machinery the whole of the U.S.A. wheat crop would be produced by four thousand men. If none but those four thousand were morally entitled to put their hands into the stockpot the greater part of its contents would remain untouched, until eventually it rotted and had to be thrown away; a process, incidentally, which under the name of sabotage (sometimes politely called restriction or rationalization) is familiar to-day throughout the world. Obviously, then, some device must be found to enable every one to draw out of the stockpot the wealth contributed by the machine. The failure to recognize the existence of this wealth, together with the consequent failure to claim and use it, is the major cause of the world's present dislocation and chaos, and the reason why every nation, no matter how prosperous and progressive, is up to its neck in astronomical and unrepayable debts, and can find no proportionate items of credit to place against them.

In so far as Shaw's economics are nineteenth-century they are useless, therefore, in a world operating a twentieth-century system of production. None of the men who influenced Shaw's economic thought, such as Ricardo, Proudhon, George, Marx, Jevons, or Ruskin, were born late enough to be compelled to wrestle with the startling implications of the Power Age. With such men Shaw agreed or disagreed, as the case might be, but none of them touched the prime problem of to-day, with the result that Shaw has little in common with

modern economists like Kitson, Soddy, Douglas, and Keynes. Sometimes, indeed, he and they do not even speak the same language. Thus, to judge from his chapter on Banking, Shaw seems to be still under the impression that the bulk of bank deposits consist of people's savings, and appears to have no inkling of the fact, as attested by such authorities as the Macmillan Committee, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and Reginald McKenna, that the bulk of bank deposits are nothing but the obverse of bank loans, and are created every time a bank makes a loan or buys a security. Nor does Bernard Shaw seem aware that credit, far from being a postponement of a money payment, as he makes it out chiefly to be, is itself money, just as surely as notes and coin are money; and that, being conveniently transferable in all denominations of the currency except halfpennies and farthings by the cheque system, it is the kind of money used to-day for more than eighty per cent of the world's monetary transactions.

Such unawarenesses, important as they are in their proper place, are mentioned here only to show that Bernard Shaw, while magnificently right about the big things, is an Old rather than a New Economist where problems of modern money and the Power Age are concerned.

One of the differences between the Old and the New Economists is, that whilst the Old thought the point of friction lay between capital and labour, the New are equally sure that it lies between industry (which is capital plus labour) on the one hand, and the financial system, under which industry is obliged to operate and suffer, on the other. No

doubt capital and labour will always fight whenever masters are greedy and men proud. But their battles do not belong to the main war: they are only skirmishes fought behind the lines or in the canteen, with trade unions, shop stewards, profit-sharing schemes, and so forth, as referees, to see fair play. For capital and labour, the New Economist feels, are on the same side, fighting for their combined lives. The fight, he discovers, is not Capital versus Labour, as advertised, but, as never advertised, Industry versus Finance. Probably because he has always had his eye on the subsidiary fight, or sideshow, Shaw has never written a play or a preface on the subject of the real and deadly one. Even his armament king in Major Barbara, and Breakages, Limited, in The Apple Cart, are dramatizations of big business, not of finance, for the business of finance is neither breakages nor armaments, but money. Only in these two plays does Shaw venture near this dangerous country, and although in the preface to one of them he discusses the power of money sufficiently to show that so-called democracies are nothing but disguised plutocracies, he soon drops the subject, as though too hot to handle.

Another difference between the Old and the New Economists might be put in this way—that the Old knew what was wrong, whilst the New have found how to put it right. The Old pointed with magnificent indignation to all the crying scandals, the industrial horrors, the unfairness, and the greed, and having done so in the teeth of an opposition grown fat on a policy of *laissez-faire*, they are entitled to take their rest with honour and the thanks of



humanity. It would be unreasonable to expect them, especially one of their number so unmathematically minded as Bernard Shaw, to grapple in the evening of their lives with momentous truths like the Just Price, or with the implications of the discovery that the Cost of Production is Consumption.

Nevertheless, with only common sense and a feeling for justice to guide him, Shaw arrived for ethical reasons at one of the major conclusions reached by New Economists for technical reasons: namely, recognition of the necessity for what is called the National Dividend. As I write, there lie before me six of Shaw's references to this subject, and had I combed his works more closely no doubt I could have turned the six into sixty. But in no reference is he able to do more than state the desirability of such a dividend, because he did not know, any more than any other Old Economist, precisely and technically where the money to pay it with was to come from. Only to the economist prejudiced by class hatred has this problem never presented any difficulty, the only question then being how to seize Peter's wealth and hand it over to Paul. Naturally, Shaw is not of this myopic breed, since he probably knows that a simple calculation on the back of an envelope will show, in the case of England, that the princely sum distributable to each of her ten million odd families, after their incomes had been levelled to £150 a year, would be in the neighbourhood of £25. This would be in the first year: in the subsequent years there would be only poverty and chaos to distribute.

Yet Shaw has said that 'Socialism means equality of income or nothing.' But this is by no means the same as saying that Smith or Jones shall be prevented from earning additional incomes if they can, or that the incomes so earned shall necessarily be equal, irrespective of Smith's and Jones's talents and occupations. Shaw has never said anything so stultifying. Nevertheless he would do well to make clearer the meaning of what he has said. He has said, for instance: 'The question of the proportion in which the national income shall be distributed can have only one answer. All the shares must be equal.' By 'national income' does he mean the balance left over after the cost of running the nation has been deducted—in other words, the sum available for distribution as dividend? Presumably he does, for elsewhere he says: 'The modern practical form of the communism of Jesus is therefore, for the present, equal distribution of the surplus of the national income that is not absorbed by simple communism.' If so, he would make his point not only clearer but more acceptable to millions by leaving out communism, not to mention Jesus; for the plain fact is, that the conception of a national dividend is outside politics, and could be brought into operation equally well by a Cabinet of Colonel Blimps as by a Soviet of Bernard Shaws.

The principle of 'to each the income he deserves' Shaw rightly damns as too silly for discussion, pointing out that Hamlet disposed of it three hundred years ago when he said: 'Use every man after his deserts, and who shall 'scape whipping?'

One of Bernard Shaw's most lovable characteristics is his concern to acknowledge the work of people

to whom for any reason he feels in the least indebted. It is a kind of loyalty, a way of paying imponderable debts, an effort to immortalize comrades who would otherwise be forgotten by giving them an honourable mention in his own works. The comrade mentioned in the Shavian dispatches in connection with the idea of the national dividend is Cobden-Sanderson, whom Shaw introduced to his readers in 1905 in the following way. 'There are two measures sprouting in the political soil which may conceivably grow to something valuable. One is the institution of the Legal Minimum Wage. The other, Old Age Pensions. But there is a better plan than either of these.' Some time ago I mentioned the subject of Universal Old Age Pensions to my fellow Socialist Mr Cobden-Sanderson, famous as an artist-craftsman in book-binding and printing. "Why not Universal Pensions for Life?" said Cobden-Sanderson. In saying this, he solved the industrial problem at a stroke. At present we say callously to each citizen: "If you want money, earn it," as if his having or not having it were a matter that concerned him alone. We do not even secure for him the opportunity of earning it: on the contrary, we allow our industry to be organized in open dependence on the maintenance of "a reserve army of unemployed" for the sake of "elasticity." The sensible course would be Cobden-Sanderson's: that is, to give every man enough to live on, so as to guarantee the community against the possibility of a case of the malignant disease of poverty, and then (necessarily) to see that he earned it.' The passage of years has only confirmed Shaw in these opinions, and by 1933 he had compressed



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them into the dogma that 'Every able-bodied and able-minded and able-souled person has an absolute right to an equal share in the national dividend.'

In short, the New Economists can teach Shaw nothing concerning the dividend's desirability. But they can perhaps point to where it can come from. It must come from where it is now, ready and waiting: namely, the common stockpot. For the national dividend is nothing else than the unearned increment of association divided up. Lying there unrecognized, it is also unsung. Once recognized for what it is, it will be found to be as real as a round of beef, and the only steps remaining to be taken will be, first, to assess the increment, and second, to monetize it. Then, duly assessed and monetized, it can be distributed as a national dividend, equally and therefore ethically, with justice to all and malice towards none.

Naturally, the national dividend would carry conditions. For instance, if it was apparent that the maximum number of children which the average married couple could bring up decently was three, then, instead of interfering with the sacred intimacy of English family life by passing a law forbidding mothers to bear more than three children, the State would simply say: 'You can have as many children as you like, but the national dividend will be payable only to three.' Or if there was work to be done and a man refused to do it, God forbid that in a free country he should be compelled: his dividend would be stopped. Similarly, a man who was not a Quaker could refuse to fight for his country, but in that case he could hardly complain if the country he refused to defend refused him a

dividend. In short, the dividend would be stopped only when services ceased to be rendered, on the excellent economic ground that if every one ceased to render services, the source from which the dividend was paid would dry up. In other words, while no one would be demoralized by thinking he was getting 'something for nothing,' the right to that something would be recognized as inalienable, except when the citizen himself alienated society by intolerable social behaviour. As long as people behaved tolerably well, they would remain in good standing as life shareholders in Great Britain, Limited, and would draw their dividends accordingly. As Shaw says, summing up the matter splendidly and briefly: 'It seems that we must begin by holding the right to an income as sacred and equal, just as we now hold the right to life as sacred and equal. Indeed the one right is only a restatement of the other.'

Is it too much to hope that Bernard Shaw will yet write the play he should have written long ago? No doubt it would be a comedy, in spite of the paramount importance of the subject, not only because its author was Bernard Shaw, but because even its villains, if drawn true to life, would not be devoid of a sense of humour. Did not Montagu Norman, for example (whose fate it was for many years to operate the financial system in England, though to his credit be it said that he did not make it), proudly keep on his mantelpiece a piece of wood, presumably of Social Credit origin since its lettering was green, informing him categorically that 'Norman Must Go'?

Just as Bernard Shaw remarked that there was

only one religion, but a hundred versions of it, so there is only one school of economics that counts, though it goes by a hundred different names—the school that seeks the life more abundant, in which no man calls another master, save from admiration.



## CHAPTER XII

### PROGRAMME

ACCORDING to Bernard Shaw, there are three things that must be put right if civilization is not to perish, like Rome of old, from atrophy of soul.

The first is the economic system just discussed. Here it is enough to repeat that one part of the problem, namely, how to provide enough subsistence for every one, has been triumphantly solved, so that there remains for solution only the other part, how to prevent the cunning ones of this earth from nullifying that triumph by using it to satisfy their own greed and lust for power.

The second need, also previously discussed, is a credible religion. The absence of any such religion in the world to-day, or of any creed intellectually honest enough not to require a permanent underpinning of superstition, strikes Bernard Shaw as 'perhaps the most stupendous fact in the whole world-situation.' The desire for complete credibility in religion shows a healthy impatience for omniscience, and on that account is doubtless most acceptable to the Life Force. By the way of criticism, however, it might be suggested, since there are probably many dimensions as well as many mansions in our Father's house, that until man himself acquires a few more dimensions, aeon by aeon and plane by plane, the only utterly credible creed at present is agnosticism's 'I Don't Know.'

Bernard Shaw, however, would square the circle of the infinite with his earthly intellect, gather

eternity into the flash of his fourscore years, and surprise the inmost secrets of God with the diminutive searchlight of his reason. His creed he would have as rational as an Act of Parliament, and the articles of his religion as clear as the multiplication table. 'A nation,' says he, 'which revises its parish councils once every three years, but will not revise its articles of religion once in three hundred, even when those articles avowedly began as a political compromise dictated by Mr Facing-Both-Ways, is a nation that needs remaking.' No doubt a nation with no religion is better off than a nation saddled with one in which it can no longer believe. But is the remedy quite so simple as Shaw makes out? From the way he writes he might think re-articling a religion as easy as altering the rules of cricket (and enforcing them), and remaking a nation only less easy than remaking a bed.

The third thing, in Bernard Shaw's own words, is that 'the deliberate infliction of malicious injuries which now goes on under the name of punishment be abandoned.' He cannot of course agree that such a description of our legal system is in any way exaggerated, that no punishment consists of malicious injuries, and that therefore there is nothing to be abandoned. Instead he insists, with considerable verbal violence, that punishment and sadism are linked together as closely as Siamese twins, and that if we could only realize how far our criminal law was at once a cloak and an instrument for our lust for cruelty, we would instantly reform it, horrified at the brutality of our own sadistic instincts. As it is, 'we have simply added the misery of punishment to the misery of crime, and the

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cruelty of the judge to the cruelty of the criminal. We have taken the bad man, and made him worse by torture and degradation, incidentally making ourselves worse in the process.' And, to use one of Shaw's most frequent phrases in discussing this subject, two blacks cannot make a white. Quite simply, all punishment is cruel, because fundamentally it cannot be separated from the desire, conscious or otherwise, to obtain pleasure from the infliction of pain. Shaw's horror of punishment is thus similar to his horror of vivisection; the occasion for horror not being the pain inflicted but the pleasure experienced by prison warder or vivisector, and the moral support given him by public opinion. It is to put us on our guard against such dark pleasures that Shaw advises parents who strike their children to be sure to do so in anger; for anger, though a fault, is admitted as such, and does not seek to disguise itself as law, or justice, or righteousness, or expiation.

'What!' cries someone at this point. 'Are all our criminals to be let loose and allowed to do as they like? Is that the idea? If so, I don't like it. We should all be murdered in our beds. For what is to restrain criminals except punishment?'

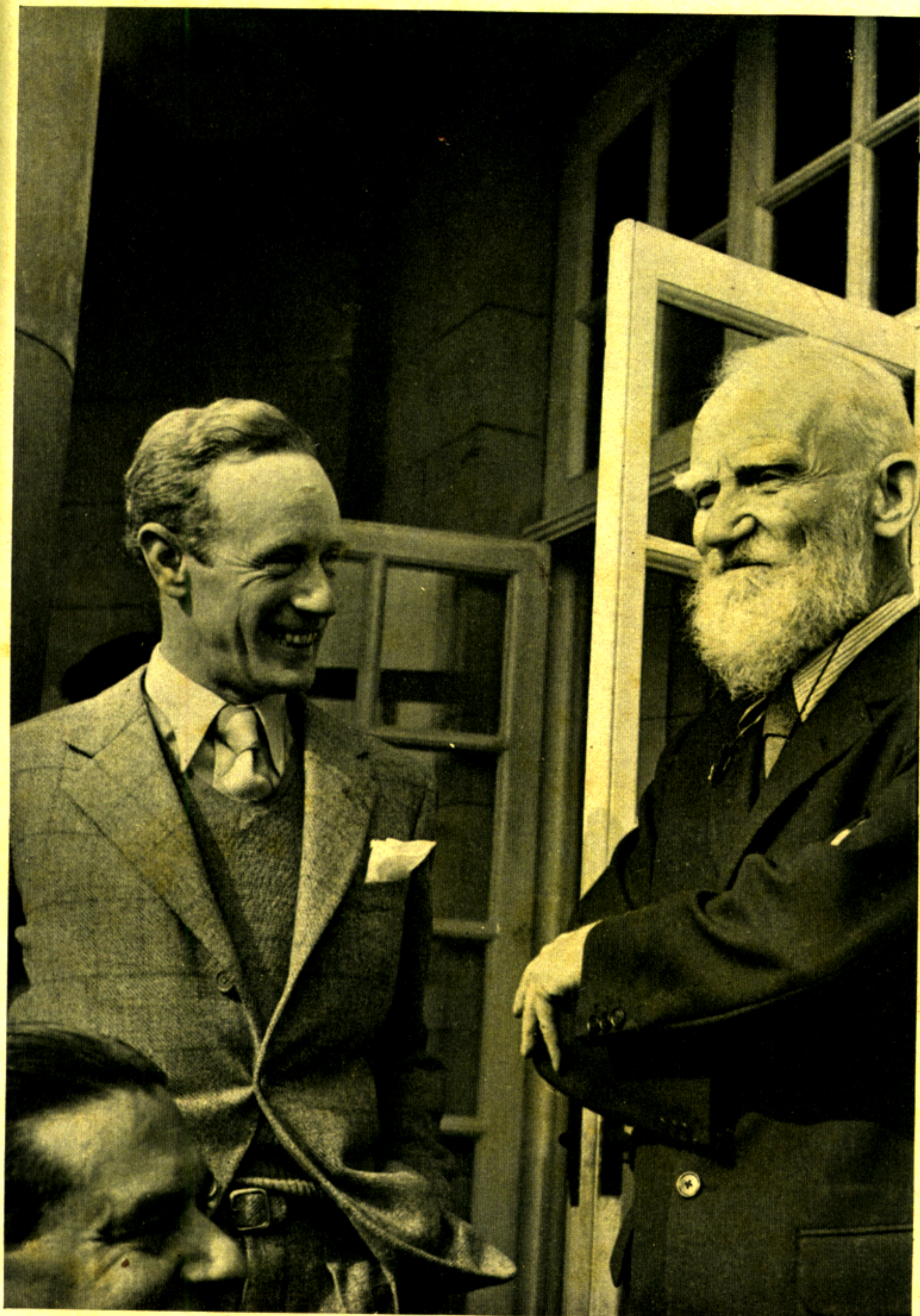
Shaw's answer is that wrongdoers shall by no means be free to do as they like. The way to deal with such people effectively, and yet without punishing them, was suggested to Bernard Shaw in a practical way when he was a boy in Ireland. He was out one day with an uncle who had with him an old gun-dog, trained, intelligent, and a good worker, who on this occasion suddenly failed, and failed repeatedly. The uncle, realizing



that the dog's usefulness was finished, shot it through the head. The incident made a great impression on the youthful Shaw: it was his first lesson in what Dictators call liquidation. Though in this particular instance usefulness had ceased by reason of old age, the same principle applies to cases where usefulness ceases by reason of crime. Indeed the principle is already applied to animals. We do not punish dogs who will not stop biting people: we destroy them. If we punish them, by stupidly chaining them up or beating them, they only become more ferocious when we release them. In its results, the shooting of Shaw's uncle's dog was equivalent to the gallows on the human plane: the dog was put out of the way just as the criminal undergoing capital punishment is put out of the way. To make the two liquidations equivalent in method, however, we should have to turn our barbarous gallows and guillotines into lethal chambers at least as comfortable as hospital wards; and to make them equivalent in motive, we should have to cast from our hearts all ideas of revenge and retribution, and simply and dispassionately decide on the most painless, expeditious, and economical way of ridding society of individuals judged intolerable.

But who is to judge? Who is to say where the line is to be drawn between the tolerable and the intolerable? That is the real problem. It is the only problem. And not even Shaw can solve it, because different communities will want to draw the line at different points. Some will want to abolish the death sentence altogether, others will want to apply it differently, and others to extend





TOPICAL PRESS

*Gabriel Pascal and Leslie Howard with G. B. S. at the shooting  
of the film of Shaw's play, Pygmalion*







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In a community which undertook the breeding virtue as a serious social experiment, for instance, the possibility to be liquidated might be extended in the most alarming directions. The lethal chamber would claim not only homicidal lunatics and imbeciles: it would be filled, if Shaw had any say in the matter, with all people who thought it gentlemanly to live on other people's earnings, moral or immoral; all Members of Parliament and Conservative women voting for the cat-o'-nine-tails; all inhabitants of Harley Street refusing to be municipalized; and all child-beaters who persisted in claiming that whippings hurt them more than their children. Not that Bernard Shaw commits himself on the subject, for he is not sure, if he were in charge, whether he would extend, contract, or altogether abolish the death sentence. That is one of the few questions on which he has not made up his mind. 'I cannot foresee which side I should take,' he says. 'A wise man does not ford a stream till he gets to it.' The point is, however, that so long as the death penalty remains, it must be administered as a painless necessity, not as a retributive judgment.

Apart from the question of capital punishment, what of the great majority of law-breakers who are clearly among the tolerables? Few criminals are hardened. What of first offenders and the like? Obviously they must be cured of their bad habits, and if necessary be sent to prison, as now. But, here again, prisons must not be regarded as places of punishment, but as places of treatment, where, with every enlightening force at our disposal, bad habits can be broken and replaced by good. Most

prisoners will find this treatment effective and will leave prison cured. The minority, who return prison again and again, thereby gradually proving themselves incurable, will eventually find themselves judged intolerable. For them the door will be opened to the lethal chamber.

The idea of transforming our prisons into reformatories and curative homes, rather than into hells of punishment and torture, received practical support by the passage of the Criminal Justice Act of 1939. And one of the encouraging signs in prison life to-day is the increasing part played in it by the prison doctor; for, thanks to the advances made in psychology and psycho-analysis, he is encouraged to treat prisoners not only for their health but also for their crimes. Imperceptibly nearer approaches the state of affairs pictured by Samuel Butler in *Erewhon*. There, it will be remembered, if you committed a crime you went to hospital, and were fined or sent to prison only if you were ill. Of the same school of thought was the judge in one of G. K. Chesterton's short stories who sentenced a prisoner to two weeks at the seaside.

Bernard Shaw would replace the threat of punishment by the threat of liquidation, and there clings to his criminal code a strong smell of chloroform. The disappearance of punishment, therefore, would not result in an increase of leniency. Rather the reverse, for every criminal would be 'made to understand that a State which is too humane to punish will also be too thrifty to waste the lives of honest men in watching or restraining dishonest men.' In short, if people give more trouble than they are worth, to the lethal chamber with them!

old-blooded but not cruel, the State must hold the keys of life and death in its hand and not be afraid to use them.

It is a great responsibility. One wonders whether it can be assumed as easily and lightly as Shaw implies. One wonders whether a State proposing to liquidate its incurable criminals can ever rid itself of responsibility for the conditions that produced them. Can society with a good conscience wash its hands of the people it has bred? If they are bad people, it is largely society's fault. Change society's conditions, and ninety per cent of its criminals would become law-abiding citizens. The quality of a tree's fruit is determined by its soil, and to better its yield, treatment must be applied to its roots. When Shaw asks, therefore, how much trouble a troublesome person is worth, surely the answer is, infinite trouble. For until society is willing to undergo root treatment, it is bound by honour, duty, and conscience to make the best it can of its crop of criminals, and accept its responsibility for them. If it were a simple question of kill or cure, there would be no problem: one would cure the criminal every time. But it is a question of killing or trying to cure. That being so, we should surely, contrary to Shaw's idea, base our legal systems and penal codes, with as few exceptions as possible, on the old saying that while there is life there is hope. And when Shaw objects to the waste involved in setting honest men to watch or restrain dishonest ones, the answer is that there is no waste in turning a dishonest man into an honest man, or in trying to: but a liquidated man is a dead loss. So long as a cure is possible we



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must keep on trying to effect it, even though w may rarely succeed.

In 1931 Bernard Shaw visited Russia, where h was interested to find the method practised on his uncle's dog applied to human beings. In Russia the intolerables are quietly liquidated rather than tried, found guilty, and punished. Liquidation, of course, has been practised many times in history. Herod, for instance, liquidated all, or nearly all, the male babies under two years of age in or near Bethlehem; the Holy Inquisition liquidated heretics of the Church; just as now the Russian OGPU and the German Gestapo liquidate political heretics. But it is, I repeat, a terrible responsibility, this taking of life in cold blood. Perhaps under régimes so fearful for their own existence as those of Russia or Germany it is the only way, but in countries less fearful would not expulsion rather than extinction answer as well? Deportation instead of liquidation of intolerables would ease the burden of responsibility, and keep the State's hands clean of blood and death. The only question would be where to deport them to. And this, on the whole, is a superficial question, for history has shown that people intolerable to one society are not only tolerable to another, but can become its very backbone and raise it to nationhood. Arguments for deportation rather than liquidation are all around us: on a diminutive scale in Pitcairn; on a tremendous scale in Australia; whilst the Foreign Legion at least can be trusted to do its job, to fight, superlatively well. In Germany, where deportation as well as liquidation is practised, the deportation is internal, into concentration camps;

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and it is admittedly quite possible, indeed only too probable, that the living deaths experienced in those cells are infinitely more horrible than anything that death itself can present. But that is not the point. The point at issue here is not the happiness of individuals, but whether society should have the right to kill, and so deprive individuals for ever of the chance of being either happy or unhappy; and whether, having that right, it should exercise it reluctantly and only in the most exceptional circumstances, as now, or as eagerly and with as little compunction as Bernard Shaw appears to advocate.

Shaw advocates liquidation because he hates punishment; he hates punishment because he thinks that, besides being ineffectual, it is cruel; and his hatred of cruelty is intense. It is probably his deepest feeling. Unless we recognize this, we shall never meet the real Bernard Shaw, nor understand his views on crime or on anything else. Hatred of cruelty is his longest suit, and with it he hopes to beat the devil. It forms the very matrix of his sensitive soul. 'I dislike cruelty,' he says, 'even cruelty to other people, and should therefore like to see all cruel people exterminated. But I should recoil with horror from a proposal to punish them.' At present we kill judicially only to punish, so that our ideas of killing are always bound up with our ideas of punishment. Thus we do not like the idea of killing an incurable homicidal maniac because we do not like the idea of punishing a lunatic. When we no longer like the idea of punishing any one, says Bernard Shaw, the question of killing will settle itself, and 'the problem of disposing of impossible people will put itself on its proper footing.

We shall drop our moral airs; but unless we run the risk of killing out absolutely, persons who give more trouble than they are worth, will run the risk of being apologetically, sympathetically, painlessly, but effectually returned to the dust from which they sprung.'

Shaw's view of the law as a passionless affair, administered impartially and impersonally, will be heartily endorsed by people to whom few things are more nauseating than the spectacle of a judge lecturing a prisoner on the evil of his ways. The only homily permissible to a judge as he looks a prisoner in the eye is the silent one addressed to himself: 'There, but for the Grace of God, go I.' Therefore anything which helps to dehumanize the law, and to relieve human beings of the unbearable responsibility of judging one another, is of value; just as anything which tends to ritualize the law, even the wigs of the barristers, the bigger wig of the judge and his gown of scarlet and ermine, should be encouraged. For we must not presume to administer justice, but be content to administer the law, fully conscious that the line we draw between the tolerable and the intolerable is a makeshift line, full of injustices. But wherever we choose to draw it, the only rule for good behaviour is to stick to its tolerated side, and our judges who liquidate or send to 'hospital' those who cross it, must do so automatically, without malice or mercy. There must be no more air of punishment or moral superiority in a criminal court when a judge passes a sentence of death or six months' hard labour, than there is at present in a divorce court when his



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In a previous chapter we had occasion to note that Bernard Shaw does not believe in vicarious expiation of sin. Here it can be added that neither does he believe in its expiation by punishment; nor by purchase, nor by the performance of some correspondingly benevolent act; nor by anything except its cessation. The only way to wipe out a sin or a crime is to stop doing it and to stop wanting to do it. A thief is a thief and knows he is a thief as long as he retains his desire to steal. No forgiveness, no indulgence, no subscription to charity, however large, and no spell of punishment, however severe, can alter the fact or atone for the crime. The thief can atone for it only by ceasing to be a thief. For, according to Shaw, 'his conscience will not be easy until he has conquered his will to steal and changed into an honest man by developing that divine spark within him which Jesus insisted on as the everyday reality of what the atheist denies.' To such an attitude one might object, of course, as Dostoevsky made his Grand Inquisitor in the *Brothers Karamazov* object, on the ground that such a concept for conduct was all very well for the few who were strong enough in spirit to bear its burden, but what of the many and the weak?

These three reforms then: fair and equal distribution of the existing plenty, to abolish poverty; the formulation and inculcation of a credible religious creed, to give men a common body of spiritual assumptions on which they can act with lively faith; and, to abolish cruelty, the transformation of punishment for criminals into treatment for the curable and extermination for the incurable: these are the main changes that Shaw would effect

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as he surveys the state of organized society to-day with its poverty and greed, spiritual hopelessness, and cruelty.

He is after many other changes too, of course, for he would reform everything, but all of them are subsidiary to the trinity mentioned above, and the majority, he thinks, would fall into their proper places once the big changes had been made. The way Shaw would have us change our views about marriage, for instance, is indicated by such remarks as the following:

‘Healthy marriages are partnerships of companionable and affectionate friendship, and cases of lifelong love, whether sentimental or sensual, ought to be sent to the doctor if not to the executioner.’

‘No political constitution will ever succeed or deserve to succeed unless it includes the recognition of an absolute right to sexual experience, and is untainted by the Pauline or romantic view of such experience as sinful in itself.’

‘The practical solution is to make the individual economically independent of marriage and the family, and to make marriage as easily dissoluble as any other partnership.’

‘To put it briefly, a contract for better or worse is a contract that should not be tolerated.’

Then there is nationalization. Industry must be nationalized; the professions must be nationalized; in the Utopia of Shaw the Republican everything possible must be nationalized, or municipalized, or socialized, or communized. A critic, by way of questioning the wisdom of the bureaucratic system in general, might inquire of Bernard Shaw whether

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he had ever visited a doctor as a panel patient. Shaw would answer that he had not, but that he knew what lay behind the question. And he would proceed to assert that the comparatively rushed and superficial treatment accorded to panel patients simply proved the scarcity of panel doctors, and of the need, therefore, to panelize and municipalize the medical profession until every G.P. was a public officer of health instead of, as now, a private trader in ill-health. Continuing, he would go on to point out that no man, however kindly and honourable, can give of his best to a panel patient when his mind is inevitably, though perhaps unconsciously, distracted by the thoughts of the easy money he can get in his private capacity by visiting rich hypochondriacs at so many guineas a time. If the critic pursued the subject by suggesting that if the private doctor went his solicitous interest and friendliness and personal touch would go with him, Shaw would reply that what he wanted from a doctor was not a personal touch but a professional touch; that friendliness was not infrequently the mask for bungling incompetence; and that a doctor whose interest in his patients was pecuniary was a doctor who was interested in keeping them ill.

And there the matter would have to rest until it was put to some practical test. The critic could fairly add, however, that if bureaucracy were examined in those countries where it was most triumphant (rampant is the usual word), it would be found riddled with the twin cankers of inefficiency and graft. The bureaucrat is inefficient because he is safe from competition; and he is prone to deal in graft because, not owning his job,



he is not interested in it. He is interested in himself, and his first care is not how much service he can put into his job but how much money he can get out of it, honestly or otherwise. He is only a cog, and he knows it. Whereas in the case of the private owner, medical or otherwise, interest in himself and interest in his job are identical, and to serve himself well he must do his job well.

Bernard Shaw, however, is all for bureaucracy and the Public Thing, advocating social control beyond the wildest Fascistic dreams. 'If civilization is to be saved for the first time in history it will have to be by a much greater extension of regulation and organization than any community has been willing to submit to.' We are nearly perishing of anarchism, he says, especially the Americans and the English. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that every additional complexity of life brings with it an additional rule for its control, Shaw seems to have a liking for the rules themselves, other people finding them regrettable. Take the case of the road. The motor-car has produced such rules as pedestrian crossings and traffic lights and speed limits, none of which are beautiful or desirable in themselves, but admittedly inevitable if we are to avoid chaos in road travel. And Shaw, to do him justice, goes far beyond the question of the desirability or inevitability of such things. Never mind, he says, whether social control is desirable; if, as is agreed, it is inevitable, then make a virtue of necessity, and see to it that it is directed to worthy objects and produces worth-while results. In short, plan. Plan to produce a better man, a

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superman; or, as I put it at the beginning of this book, plan to Breed Virtue. Then peace, too, will have a purpose.

To return to Shaw's three-point practical programme, in what frame of mind shall we carry it out, and by what light? Shaw would say, I think, in a religious frame of mind and by the light of God's purpose. With the prophet of old he seems to cry, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Keep it clear. Do not be a stumbling-block to life by depositing yourself sluggishly or obstinately, set or content, in the middle of that way. Never write *Finis* to anything you have accomplished unless you are prepared to scrap it and put something better in its place. Cast out prejudices. Hold suspect all established opinions, and question the wisdom of your elders. Know, as Lao-Tze knew, that flexibility, whether in principles or habits, is a sign of life, and rigidity a sign of death. Neither collect superstitions nor cherish traditions, lest, like weed on a ship, they hamper your progress. Never say *die* and never say *done*. Above all, be curious. For to be curious is to be alive, and to be alive is to be acceptable to God and eligible, with Him, to fight and conquer sin and suffering, ignorance and blindness, stupidity and death.

The Bible describes certain people as being possessed of devils. Bernard Shaw, like Florence Nightingale, is possessed of an angel. His angel takes hold of him, sets his feet on the mountain slope, and together they cry *Excelsior!* Imbued with a restless impulse to progress, Shaw once again finds that the only things worth while are the pilgrim's journey, the becoming, the learning, and

the striving. 'Science,' he says, 'becomes dangerous only when it imagines that it has reached its goal. What is wrong with priests and popes is that instead of being apostles and saints, they are nothing but empirics who say "I know" instead of "I am learning," and pray for credulity and inertia as wise men pray for scepticism and activity.'

✓ All progress consists in proving untrue the seemingly true, but so far only science appears to recognize this. The music to which science marches is the detonating noise of exploding hypotheses. Thus, before the electron could be discovered, the atom had to be set up as the ultimate unit of matter. But at the back of its mind science knew that it had set the atom up only to knock it down; un-splittable, the next step was to split it. Indeed, in as far as science refuses to accept its conclusions as conclusive, in so far does it achieve the feat of perpetual motion. As with science, so it should be with religion, and with all life, if these are to be forces as distinct from mere habits. We must learn to apply the scientific attitude to life itself. For if science suffered from stationary and therefore stagnant morals in the way that life and religion suffer from them, the scientists who tried to split the atom would have been imprisoned: those who succeeded, crucified.

The case for Shaw the Immoralist, then, is that all progress depends on change, and that all evolution in thought or conduct first appears as heresy and misconduct. 'And as the law of God in any sense of the word which can now command a faith proof against science is a law of evolution, it follows that the law of God is a law of change, and



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that when the Churches set themselves against change as such, they are setting themselves against the law of God.' This was the underlying thought that made Saint Joan such a vital and inspired play. For in casting out Joan and handing her over to the secular arm to be burnt, the Church was unwittingly denying the latest revelation of Divine Purpose, destroying a tentacle of Creative Evolution, spoiling an experiment of the Life Force, and refusing to receive into its uncatholic bosom an embodiment of the Word.

In the preface to *On the Rocks* Shaw puts these same thoughts into a dramatic duologue between Jesus and Pilate, part of which runs as follows:

JESUS. Without sedition and blasphemy the world would stand still and the kingdom of God never be a stage nearer. The Roman Empire began with a wolf suckling two human infants. If these infants had not been wiser than their fostermother your empire would be a pack of wolves. It is by children who are wiser than their fathers, subjects who are wiser than their emperors, beggars and vagrants who are wiser than their priests, that men rise from being beasts of prey to believing in me and being saved.

PILATE. What do you mean by believing in you?

JESUS. Seeing the world as I do. What else could it mean?

PILATE. And you are the Christ, the Messiah, eh?

JESUS. Were I Satan, my argument would still hold.

PILATE. And I am to spare and encourage every heretic, every rebel, every lawbreaker, every rascalion lest he should turn out to be wiser than all the generations who made the Roman law and built up the Roman Empire on it?

JESUS. By their fruits ye shall know them. Beware how you kill a thought that is new to you. For that thought may be the foundation of the kingdom of God on earth,

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PILATE. It may also be the ruin of all kingdoms, all law, and all human society. It may be the thought of the beast of prey striving to return.

JESUS. The beast of prey is not striving to return: the kingdom of God is striving to come. The empire that looks back in terror shall give way to the kingdom that looks forward with hope.

Has Bernard Shaw turned a somersault, then? Does he no longer believe in liquidation? Are we to tolerate every one, lest we do away with the wrong people; that is, the right people? For, as Jesus and Socrates and Joan found to their cost, no one is so intolerable to society as saints, sages, seers, and prophets. Shaw answers: 'We must persecute, even to death; and all we can do to mitigate the danger of persecution, is, first, to bear in mind that unless there is a large liberty to shock conventional people, and a well-informed sense of the value of originality, individuality, and eccentricity, the result will be apparent stagnation covering a repression of evolutionary forces which will eventually explode with extravagant and probably destructive violence.'

Progress to godhead by the method of trial and error, the giving to every living thing, especially to the new thing that seems dangerously immoral, a chance to prove its worth: this is Bernard Shaw's spiritual programme and pilgrimage.

Yet he is no enthusiastic theorist carried away by the exuberance of his own ideas. As long ago as 1904, when in middle age, he realized that man as he exists to-day is incapable of net progress. And with the passage of time he realizes this more than ever, declaring, when he wrote Geneva in 1938 in

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old age, that man as a political animal was a failure, and that until man made up his mind to change for the better, he, Bernard Shaw, could do nothing about it except employ his talents as a playwright professionally, and extract from the situation what tragedy and comedy he could. But man, he reminds us, *can* change, if only he wills it and wants to ardently enough. Where there 's a will there 's a way.

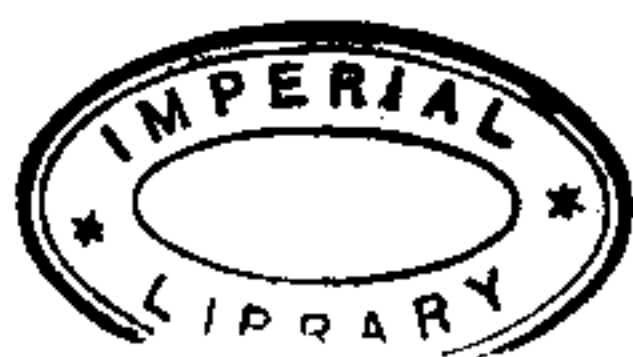


## CHAPTER XIII

G. B. S.

FOR himself, work is the only thing. Let the ice-cap form, and the universe expand till it burst or stretch till it snap, Bernard Shaw will fight on, and write on, while his eye can see, his tongue speak, and his fingers hold a pen. 'I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence. That is the law of my life.' The speaker is Don Juan in his Shavian Hell, but the voice is the voice of the real Bernard Shaw.

With Shaw, work is a habit rather than a virtue, and what he cannot stop he has learned to like. Is he happy? Only when he is working, only when he is pursuing his purpose, only when he is careful to avoid the pursuit of happiness; for by that means, as Maeterlinck reminded us in *The Blue Bird*, happiness is never found. 'The pursuit of happiness is perhaps the most miserable of human occupations,' says Shaw. 'Happiness is a by-product,' remarks his John Tanner. 'I no longer desire happiness: life is nobler than that,' exclaims his Marchbanks. 'Happiness is the most tedious thing in the world to me. Should I be what I am if I cared about happiness?' asks his Napoleon. And his Devil, a perfect gentleman, has nothing but happiness to offer his guests in hell. No, says Bernard Shaw: Work! and all the other things will be added unto you. 'I must take myself as I am and get what







4 Whitehall Court, London  
Bernard Shaw and his Secretary, Blanche Patch  
*'I must take myself as I am and get what work I can out of myself'*



work I can out of myself.' And he practises what he preaches. It seems to have agreed with him.

As with happiness, so with fame. Referring to Widowers' Houses, he remarked: 'I heartily hope the time will come when this play will be both utterly impossible and utterly unintelligible.' The evils of landlordism existed, and that was enough to induce an eager young Shaw, as a good dramatist and a good journalist, to expose them. In seeking a dragon to slay he found fame, which, like happiness, came to him as a by-product. So, too, with immortality: he is interested in it no more than he is frightened of death. 'I am looking,' he says, 'for a race of men who are not afraid of death.' For himself, he believes that the spark which is in him will return at death to the main stream of Life, and so help to 'renew the battalions of the future.'

It is fitting to draw to a close on this note of a Bernard Shaw who is seriously optimistic, who declines to abandon hope for Man, and whose spear refuses to be broken. For such a Bernard Shaw is the real Bernard Shaw. When a twilight of apathy has settled on the minds of men, when brute force aims to overrun Europe, when disillusion makes us ask bitterly how many more times the War to End War has to be fought, when old men fail to hang their heads in shame at the diabolical mess they are handing on to their children and dare call civilization, it is small wonder that those children ask sceptically whether life is worth living except on the most self-indulgent terms. 'What of life?' this generation cries out in cynical disdain. There is neither disdain nor cynicism in the unfaltering

voice of this ancient whitebeard, Bernard Shaw, as he answers: 'Everything!'

Beside this dogged insistence on hope, this obstinate optimism, this holding up of the heavens even while they seem to fall, all else about Bernard Shaw dwindles into unimportance. His hundred and one interests might be mentioned, but all belong more properly to the ephemeral and incidental part of a man's life, and with that we are not especially concerned. Thus mention might be made of Bernard Shaw's love of swimming; or his interest in boxing; or his leaning towards the mystical philosophy of strength culture professed by the ex-champion wrestler George Hackenschmidt; or how, being in a sufficiency of funds, he declined the money, a sum of £8,000 odd, when awarded the Nobel Prize (Nobel, by the way, was the inventor of dynamite); or how at one time certain tradesmen used to make more money by selling the neat spidery signature on Shaw's weekly cheques than by cashing them in the ordinary way, and how Shaw could stop the practice only by paying for his vegetables and groceries in cash; or how the Royalist Society of the U.S.A. once voted him King of America and Will Rogers Vice-King. But our knowledge of the essential man is not thereby much increased. Indeed some of the Shavian trimmings tend definitely to obscure the real Bernard Shaw. Joey the Clown, for example, frequently usurps his master's voice, though I suppose it is hardly correct to call Joey a trimming, since Shaw inherited him from his father and took delight in bringing him to fullness.

These considerations notwithstanding, there are

one or two matters worth mentioning, in the hope that they may help to bring to life a portrait so accurate that it may be dull, and touch it up with detail without blurring its main features.

One is the matter of Shaw's manners. Without question, but contrary to general opinion, these are good. I have no doubt, for instance, that nothing but innate good manners prevented the youthful Shaw from disentangling himself from the prostitute, aforementioned, until they were half way up Bond Street. This does not mean, however, that Shaw is never rude. It means that when he is rude he is deliberately so, with the result that his rudeness means and is intended to mean something. Only a well-mannered person can be rude with effect, and being rude is one of Shaw's ways of teaching. Thus he refused to attend Sir Henry Irving's funeral at Westminster 'on the grounds that Literature has no place at Irving's graveside.' In the same way he declined to contribute or take part in Dame Marie Tempest's Jubilee, doubtless on the ground that she had been singing away merrily in light opera when she ought to have been busy fitting herself to play heroines first in Ibsen and then in Shaw.

Even when he is rude, or perhaps particularly then, Shaw takes care to be witty. But sometimes his shafts are less sharpened than usual, or aimed at people who are not amused and who yet have wit enough themselves to pay him back in his own coin. Thus when Winston Churchill's mother, Lady Randolph Churchill, exercising her functions as a great Edwardian hostess, asked the remarkable dramatic critic with the red beard to her house-party for the week-end, the remarkable dramatic



critic replied to the invitation: 'Why this assault on my well-known principles about week-ends?' This communication being made on a post card, Lady Randolph seized a télégraph form and scribbled on it: 'I know nothing of your principles but hope they are better than your manners.' This incident is interesting chiefly as marking one of the few occasions on which Shaw failed to score a bull's-eye; or indeed to score at all, for his effort reads like that of a tyro trying to make an impression. To which the answer is, of course, that he made an impression.

Besides being natural, Shaw's manners are cultivated, for his constitutional timidity compelled him to cultivate the whole of that side of his nature which he had to present to his fellow beings in the course of social contact. The result is a consciousness which lends his good manners an agreeable bouquet or flavour which the good manners of people more confident by nature somehow lack.

The necessity for good manners is not infrequently stressed by Bernard Shaw in his plays. How comforting, for instance, it would be if husbands in real life could deal with those importunate women who want to rid them of their wives, as good-manneredly as King Magnus in *The Apple Cart* puts Orinthia in her place when that lady begs him to shoot or drown or divorce Jemima his queen. No fur flies, there is no 'scene' as he gently casts over his mistress the following spell of Shavian wisdom and music. 'Do not let us fall into the common mistake of expecting to become one flesh and one spirit. Every star has its own orbit; and between it and its nearest neighbour there is not

only a powerful attraction but an infinite distance. When the attraction becomes stronger than the distance the two do not embrace; they crash together in ruin. We two also have our orbits, and must keep an infinite distance between us to avoid a disastrous collision. Keeping our distance is the whole secret of good manners: and without good manners human society is intolerable and impossible.' On another occasion the same monarch interrupts at once when a member of his Cabinet accuses him of jesting. 'I am not jesting, Mr Nicobar. But I am certainly trying to discuss our differences in a good-humoured manner. Do you want me to lose my temper and make scenes?'

Good temper is another striking quality of Bernard Shaw's. Probably no one has fought more fights than he and lost his temper so seldom. Always he gives the impression of being furious with the fault and on the friendliest and most sympathetic terms with the offender. Rumpuses are such a waste of energy and time; except, of course, on paper, when a furious onslaught may do a great amount of good, and produce a conversion and incidentally fine prose. But such an onslaught will always be about some idea rather than about anything personal. As regards Shaw's own feelings, they are expressed when he makes Julius Caesar cry out: 'Resent! Oh thou foolish Egyptian, what have I to do with resentment?'

Good temper is the outcome of one of two causes: serenity of outlook, or innate laziness that cannot be bothered to lose its temper; and Shaw, or G. B. S., as he is often called in a commingling of affection and respect, is not lazy. His serenity, on

the other hand, radiates from him in a kind of mental glow, warming and lighting his every activity. Because of it, he acts on those he meets like a spiritual needle-bath with a thousand jets, or like the sunshine he is always advocating. Even meeting him on the talkies is a tonic. In advertisements we see pictures of people who are paid to say that they are serene and bursting with life because they have eaten a certain food or drunk a certain drink; this kind of serenity, however, induced from without by calories of vitamins, is not Shaw's kind. His is from within, and is the cause rather than the result of his surprising health. His vegetarian diet never produced his serenity: the serenity was already there, and persuaded him to the vegetarian diet. Derived in this way, inwardly, this quality never wears out and serves its owner in all manner of ways, enabling him to remain imperturbable master of all situations, unruffled and unembarrassed. For example, as he stood on the stage before an enthusiastically applauding house to make his speech at the first night of *Arms and The Man*, an heroic youth in the gallery waited for the silence and then broke it with a piercing hiss. In a flash and not discomfited at all, Shaw fixed the interrupter with a broad smile and shouted back: 'Sir, I quite agree with you; but what can we two do against a whole houseful of the opposite opinion?'

It is with this good-tempered serenity that he pays his compliments. He wanted a certain actress to play the part of Candida in a new production, she having played it so beautifully in a previous one. She wrote saying that she was sorry, but meanwhile she had married and did not like to leave



her small boy; whereupon Shaw, unlike so many managers or authors, who would have implied that there were just as good fish in the sea, wrote back on a post card (he is always writing post cards): 'Damn you, madam, you have ruined my play: I hope your son grows up to be an actor.'

Similarly, he can comfort and inspire. Meeting an actress who had only a walking-on part in *Saint Joan*, he cheered her up by twinkling at her: 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'

Conversely Bernard Shaw is an adept at rapping people over the knuckles if he thinks they deserve it. There is the story of the beautiful lady (often erroneously identified with the late Isadora Duncan) who wrote to Shaw pointing out that he had the finest brain in the world and she the finest body, and proposing, for the sake of posterity, that they should unite to produce a wonder-child inheriting her beauty and his brains. This was too much for the author of *Man and Superman* and creator of *Ann Whitefield*, and Shaw replied, on a post card as usual: 'Ah; but suppose it were to inherit my beauty and your brains!'

Not being in the habit of reading post cards unless they are addressed to me, and not having been born when *Arms and The Man* had its first night, I have no ready means of verifying these stories. But even if they never happened at all, Shaw must learn to suffer legends to grow around him, as he suffers so many things, serenely.

Nations he chastizes as readily as individuals, and the greater the nation the more he tries to shock and shake it out of its complacency. England, of course, is used to him, and has reached the stage

of saying: 'It's only Bernard Shaw.' America, on the other hand, is still sensitive to the Shavian sting, and when The Apple Cart's Powermistress General declared that Americans were 'only Wops pretending to be Pilgrim Fathers,' Americans, on the whole, were not amused. Yet this was less disparaging than Shaw's much earlier description of the United States as a Nation of Villagers, capable of producing heroic sub-postmistresses and blacksmiths, but unconscious of anything ten miles away, or than his later definition of the hundred-per-cent American as ninety-nine per cent idiot. Worst of all, perhaps, for those in glass houses who like to throw stones, is Shaw's explanation that such descriptions apply to every nation on earth, but that the American is conceited enough to think that he is the only fool in the world, and takes them as personal insults accordingly, though Sinclair Lewis, with his Babbitts and Ganttrys, won the Nobel Prize by being harder on his countrymen than fifty Bernard Shaws.

The truth is, Shaw likes fighting successful people, successful nations, successful institutions; attacking them; rousing them; trying their mettle; and, as he puts it, 'knocking down their sand castles so as to make them build stone ones.' We must not expect Shaw to be insincerely polite or merely 'nice,' for no one with any force in him is ever altogether 'nice.' In short, the only thing to do with Shaw, since we refuse to take him seriously, is to grin and bear him.

It is not difficult to tolerate him if we look on him as a sort of institution, and regard his chastisements as so many bulletins issued at irregular

intervals from a Ministry of Moral Health. These we can then bear, when similar chastisements by upstarts would be intolerable. That Shaw is now such an institution is evidenced by the remarkable fact that, alone of all men living, his fame belongs not only to the twentieth century but to the nineteenth as well, and that he made his mark in two worlds, the pre-War and the post-War. Those two vast hurdles of our era, the turn of the century and the War, this Victorian took in his stride like some calm Colossus, while smaller men jibbed and fell at one or the other. For half a century and more Shaw has kept going, his vigour unabated, his course undeflected, and his star undimmed. Thus, by sheer persistence and length of service, he has established a sort of right of way across the wide domain of public feelings, and we no longer grudge him admittance to his well-worn path, trample on what he may. We have granted him a tormentor's licence as well as a jester's, because as an institution he is well-established, and can therefore do no harm. He is twenty years older than the Albert Memorial.

Taking us behind the scenes of this one-man show called Bernard Shaw, our public castigator confesses that he is 'only a brute nor'-nor'-west,' with the result that people who meet him are surprised to find a sympathetic, affable, courteous fellow who obviously would not hurt a fly, in place of the vitriolic fire-snorting ogre his writings had led them to expect.

One criticism remains to be disposed of. It is a major one, not because it is valid but because it is common. Representative of it is the puerile complaint that Bernard Shaw is 'only a talker' or 'only



a writer,' and not a man of action. As though good talk or fine writing grew on every bush! Such so-called critics should complain because the rose does not bear figs, or because the blackbird cannot roar like a lion. Shaw does not pretend to be a man of action, any more than he pretends to be a sword-swallower, but is, in his own words, 'a sedentary literary civilian, constitutionally timid.' No doubt it is easy to say that Shaw is all gas and gaiters, and that while he has been writing, others have been doing. For instance, it could be said that while Shaw was writing on prison reform, first Winston Churchill and then Sir Samuel Hoare were tackling and effecting it; or that while Shaw tried to break down the obscurantism concerning prostitution and venereal disease by writing Mrs Warren's Profession and urging a hearing for Brieux's plays, it was broken down not by him but, thanks largely to the War, Marie Stopes in England and Margaret Sanger in America; or that more was done to rectify the iniquities of the English marriage contract by A. P. Herbert after only two years in Parliament, than by Bernard Shaw in fifty years of reasoned invective on the subject. But such an attitude leaves out of consideration altogether the power of the pen, with its dissemination of thought, its subtle influence, and its slow working. No one can gauge how much or how little Shaw's steady torrent of propaganda helped to change public opinion, slowly and insidiously, and so pave the way for such reforms, quarter-way and slight though they be.

He who can, does: he who cannot, teaches. So runs one of the Shavian aphorisms, with some dis-

paragement to the teacher. Yet teachers are among the most important and powerful people in the world, because what the man of action does depends on what he has been taught. Stalin, for instance, is a man of action, but all his actions derive from the thoughts he imbibed when, as a novice for the priesthood, he first read Karl Marx during forbidden hours in his dormitory. Swords can destroy everything except the thoughts and ideas propagated by the pen, and in wielding the pen Shaw wields the mightier weapon. In any case he had no choice, physiologically speaking; for phrenologists point to the bulge at the back of the head as the source or bump of 'action,' and Shaw's head, when seen in profile, though magnificently domed all round, reminds one of nothing so much as a croquet hoop.

Admittedly we should owe an additional debt to Bernard Shaw as a social reformer, if he possessed the specific talents for getting things done which characterized a man like Plimsoll. Like Bernard Shaw, Plimsoll was a freelance with no official post nor any connection with the Government or anything else. Yet, by sheer dint of pestering and lobbying year in and year out, he managed to effect what he wanted, which was to make the sea safe for sailors, and his fame rests secure for ever in the Plimsoll line painted on every mercantile vessel that goes to sea. But Bernard Shaw, unlike Plimsoll, is a man of many parts, and our quarrel with him as a man of inaction is really a quarrel with him because he is not wholly a social reformer. He is such a good one, on paper, that we want him to go further. Sometimes he does, and is moved to downright Plimsollic action by, as we

should expect, the spectacle of cruelty. In 1925, for instance, he was motoring in the Isle of Wight and passed some prisoners from Parkhurst Prison. Shaw noticed that they were wearing chains, and found that they also ate and slept in them. His feelings may be imagined. He took the matter up at once, with the result that now that particular piece of barbarity has disappeared.

Normally, however, Shaw is content to stay at his desk, the centre of his outspreading web. As the cobbler is at home with his last, and Diogenes at his best in his tub, so Shaw is wise to keep hold of his pen. For he is in a most enviable position. He is the Leader of an Opposition who knows that he will never be called on to assume office, and is therefore free to say what he likes. He will never have to translate his words into actions, or deal responsibly and practically to-morrow with the things he criticizes so irresponsibly and theoretically to-day. He can let himself go as trenchantly as he pleases. Happy man, to have the gift of words, and never be forced to eat them!

There can be no more history about a happy life than there are plays about happy marriages, and the well-ordered tranquillity and domesticity of Bernard Shaw's life, in its second half aided, shielded, and understood by his wife, are such as to test the powers of biographers. About him clings the fastidiousness of the sojourner. He has none of the airs or interests of the man of property, for to him all property is theft. His kingdom is of the intellect, and his most valued possessions are the treasures of his mind, ideas. \*

Those ideas are not peculiarly his own: he found



them. They are common property, and he would pass them to us as eagerly as he received them from others. For Bernard Shaw, though an original writer, is not an original thinker. Interpreter rather than creator, he has founded no new religion, formulated no new philosophy, discovered no new truth of science, economics, politics, or art. Even his plays are constructed avowedly on classical lines, and intentionally packed with stage tricks hundreds of years old; whilst his characters, far from being original, are compounded of the people in the modern world around him.

But if Shaw is not original, he is none the less unique. No one can make such glitteringly effective use of the philosophies and discoveries of others. He takes their unpromising material, distils and simplifies it, then dresses it in parable and decorates it with homely simile until it is completely humanized without ever being dull, with the result that as an elucidator he is unrivalled. On almost every subject G. B. S. acts with gay competence as guide to the laity, initiating its members into the mazes of the experts and making their intricacies plain. By the alchemy of genius he transmutes the abstruse theories and academic jargon of the specialist into forms easily digestible by the willing but none too clever layman. He acts as a powerful digestive, and is, as it were, an enzyme of the intellect. His humorous juices enable Tom, Dick, and Harry to feed on problems they would otherwise avoid as indigestible. No matter how big and tough the problem; or whether it be religious, like Evolution; or political, like Democracy; or scientific, like the precession of the equinoxes and the perihelion

of Mercury, let the Shavian juices act on it, and at once it becomes not only assimilable but palatable, with the feeders, like Oliver Twists, asking for more.

It is significant that as Bernard Shaw became established and therefore increasingly able to write to please himself, he drew increased attention to his essential role of interpreter, until finally he imprinted it on the title-pages of some of his later plays. There he belittles Shaw the mere playwright to emphasize Shaw the preacher and teacher. Thus his forty-third play, *Too True To Be Good*, is described as not a play at all but as 'A Collection of Stage Sermons'; whilst the word Lesson, an apt description of the Shavian drama as a whole, makes its long overdue appearance in his fiftieth play, the full title of which reads: 'In Good King Charles's Golden Days: a History Lesson by a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.'

When this Fellow teaches history or anything else, his lessons are without tears, but they bear fruit because he brings to life all he touches. It is the touch of genius. How rare it is! Many teachers have the necessary equipment of knowledge, how many can pass that knowledge on? Shaw, however, in addition to an equipment above and wider than most, possesses the born teacher's special gifts of painstaking lucidity, patience, and infectious enthusiasm. In short, the real Bernard Shaw is Bernard Shaw the Teacher. And to teach well he has kept his mind as an athlete keeps his body, trained, fit, exercised, and fresh. As for the body, it is a part of that irksome matter that must be mastered by spirit, and as such Shaw has treated

his, abstemiously and with discipline, fastidiously but without fuss. One result is a score of fifty plays not out.

This rich Bolshevik, this comfortable Spartan, this healthy-minded Puritan, this ascetic who yet insists that he is a voluptuary and that all the conventional self-indulgences are self-tortures, this Bernard Shaw who takes neither drugs nor drink, who chews no gum and smokes no tobacco, yet confesses to one stimulant: he goes to church. Our eyebrows will lower themselves again when it is added that Shaw's church is any church so long as it is empty. He has been heard to remark in that laughingly matter-of-fact tone he always instinctively adopts to hide his innermost feelings, that an empty cathedral is the one place he can go into and be at peace. There, one with God and with the beggar at the door alike, he can forget that he ever heard the name Bernard Shaw. Released for a moment from its thralldom, he can dip into the well of his being that has no name, and draw upon its waters. Whatever their depth, they are at least still. No bubble of wit breaks their quiet surface. And there for a while the weary actor can rest from his part in the human drama, take off both the comic and the tragic mask, and reach the other side of good and evil.

But let us beware. Blake said: 'Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.' In church Shaw does neither. It infuriates him to be sentimentalized as a tragic figure behind the scenes or when the audience is not looking. Truly his father's son, his sense of the ludicrous can always be relied on to put in an appearance in life, as in his plays, to



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save or smash any situation. We remember the story of Grimaldi. A certain man went to see a doctor to be cured of depression. The doctor, finding that he was suffering from acute melancholia, recommended him to go to the circus and see Grimaldi. The man smiled and said: 'I am Grimaldi.' Shaw, on the other hand, with Joey's help, cures himself, and at his sickest delivers his doctors from the blues.

Let us leave him, then, alone in his empty church with 'broken bits of laughter stuck about his heart,' and go our way.

But the church is not empty after all. In the dim stained light there is another figure; someone with the face of a young saint, yet with white hair, who stands as though in a trance, gazing. Who can it be? He looks like a madman. Or a genius, perhaps. And what is a genius? Shaw overhears us. Always anxious to answer questions, he runs nimbly up into the pulpit, enjoying himself as though he were back in Hyde Park and as though every pew were filled, and there, with perfect articulation and the most beautiful Irish accent, he proclaims: 'A genius is a person who, seeing farther and probing deeper than other people, has a different set of ethical valuations from theirs, and has energy enough to give effect to this extra vision and its valuations in whatever manner best suits his or her specific talents.' Noting how closely the cap fits him, we thank Shaw for being so lucid, and walk down the nave towards the stranger.

It is only Peter Keegan, a poor madman who will harm nobody. Shaw will not mind his being there. Madman, yes; but genius, no; for though

Peter's ethical valuations are different from other people's, he has never in this world been able to give effect to them. Like vulgar sightseers, we prod him with a question: what is he thinking of, we ask. He answers that he is dreaming of heaven. Pressing our curiosity, for we do not meet Keegans every day, and with our mind's eyes suddenly filled, as likely as not, with Tom Broadbent's picture of heaven as 'a sort of pale blue satin place, with all the pious old ladies of the congregation sitting as if they were at a service, and some awful person in a study at the other end of the hall,' we ask Father Keegan what his picture of heaven is like. The unfrocked priest replies: 'In my dreams it is a country where the State is the Church and the Church the people: three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life: three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped: three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine: three in one and one in three. It is, in short, the dream of a madman.'

Bernard Shaw has come down from the pulpit, and before retiring to his meditations is hanging around clearly waiting to be called a genius to his face. If we call him a madman as well, I do not think he will mind: he will be in such good company.





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### A LIST OF BERNARD SHAW'S PLAYS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER WITH NOTES

ALTHOUGH most of Bernard Shaw's plays have been mentioned in one connection or another in the preceding pages, no systematic tabulation or examination of them has been attempted. This omission is intentional.

In the first place, dissection of any work of art is a risky business, and liable to end in a sorry mess. Even if successful, the process smacks too much of the lecture-room to be undertaken by any one, in connection with the Shavian drama, except some learned professor intent on finding material for a ponderous volume because he has nothing better to do. For myself, I decline to inflict on any one in respect of Shaw the kind of torture inflicted on me at school in respect of Shakespeare. The wonder is that I or any one else ever survived those horrible 'courses' of Shakespeare, in which a whole term would be spent in tearing a single play to pieces, until one was heartily sick of the very name of Shakespeare. Perhaps such 'courses' are now things of the past. I hope so.

In the second place, I have tried throughout this book to convey the impression that Bernard Shaw is not a dramatist first and foremost, but a preacher and a teacher, and I have no wish to destroy that impression. It is indeed almost true to say that Shaw is a dramatist only by accident. In this connection the list of contents in his volume of collected



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Prefaces is instructive. The book was published in 1934; but its list, although incomplete, will serve to illustrate my point. There are thirty-seven entries. These are divided into five groups: Sociological; Political; Religious; Autobiographical and Professional; and Miscellaneous. Of a total of 777 pages no less than 625 are devoted to the sociological, political, and religious sections, and most of the remaining pages to autobiographical and miscellaneous subjects or to artistic and dramatic criticism. Those relating to Shaw's plays, therefore, or to Shaw as a dramatist, are few.

A study of the Index to the same volume is equally illuminating. According to it, and not unnaturally, the subject dealt with most extensively in the volume is Shaw. Then comes Marriage, and while it is true that the Stage takes third place, yet under this heading is included everything which might have been entered under Theatre, for when we turn up Theatre we find, 'see Stage.' Even so, the entries under Stage are almost equalled by those under (in this order) Children; Doctors; Prisons; Jesus; and Shakespeare.

Thus in the back door, as it were, of Shaw's own works his main interests stand disclosed, and they are not in the drama. Rightly or wrongly, I am convinced that Shaw is interested in the drama (apart from such interest as is shown by any cultured person) only as a successful professional. Conversely, that his main interests lie outside the drama accounts partly for his greatness as a dramatist; for, unlike most playwrights, he has plenty to write about.

But whatever may be said, Bernard Shaw remains

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a unique dramatist, the greatest of his epoch. Accordingly, for the benefit of those who do not like to feel that these incontrovertible facts have been unduly obscured, there follows a list of the plays. They are put in the order in which they were written, and are accompanied by short notes. Inverted commas mark passages in Shaw's own words.

### (1) WIDOWERS' HOUSES (1892)

'In Widowers' Houses I have shewn middle-class respectability and younger son gentility fattening on the poverty of the slum as flies fatten on filth. That is not a pleasant theme.'

### (2) THE PHILANDERER (1893)

'In The Philanderer I have shewn the grotesque sexual compacts made between men and women under marriage laws which represent to some of us a political necessity (especially for other people), to some a divine ordinance, to some a romantic ideal, to some a domestic profession for women, and to some that worst of blundering abominations, an institution which society has outgrown but not modified, and which "advanced" individuals are therefore forced to evade.'

### (3) MRS WARREN'S PROFESSION (1893)

'In Mrs Warren's Profession I have gone straight to the fact that, as Mrs Warren puts it, "the only way for a woman to provide for herself is for her to be good to some man who can afford to be good to her."'

Lest we should be tempted to feel superior to the prostitute, Shaw points out that there are large bodies of prostitute men: 'for instance, the playwrights and journalists, to whom I myself belong, not to mention the legions of lawyers, doctors, clergymen, and platform

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politicians who are daily using their highest faculties to belie their real sentiments: a sin compared to which that of a woman who sells the use of her person for a few hours is too venial to be worth mentioning; for rich men without conviction are more dangerous in modern society than poor women without chastity.'

The above three plays were labelled by their author Unpleasant because 'their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts.' The next three plays he called Pleasant, by contrast, since 'they deal less with the crimes of society, and more with its romantic follies and with the struggles of individuals against those follies.'

### (4) ARMS AND THE MAN (1894)

An anti-romantic comedy, deriving its title from the beginning of Virgil's Aeneid, *Arma virumque cano*.

Here Shaw is in full tilt against the stock heroic figures of the stage. The romantic heroine is made to descend from her impossible pedestal, and the strutting, military musical-comedy hero is turned into a figure of fun.

The play is not an attempt to strip war of its glamour, though it does so incidentally, as much as a conflict between the artificial morality of Sergius, a stage soldier, and the natural morality of Bluntschli, a real soldier.

### (5) CANDIDA (1894)

A Pre-Raphaelite play.

Two of the forces which influenced Shaw at this time were the Pre-Raphaelite movement and Christian Socialism. The former he dramatized in Marchbanks the poet; the latter in Morrell the clergyman. The conflict between these two he set against the background of Candida herself, who, as he confided to Ellen Terry, 'is the Virgin Mother and nobody else.'



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### (6) THE MAN OF DESTINY (1895)

'Hardly more than a bravura piece to display the virtuosity of the two principal performers.'

### (7) YOU NEVER CAN TELL (1896)

'An attempt to comply with many requests for a play in which the much paragraphed "brilliancy" of *Arms and The Man* should be tempered by some considerations for the requirements of managers in search of fashionable comedies for West End theatres. I had no difficulty in complying, as I have always cast my plays in the ordinary practical comedy form in use at all the theatres; and far from taking an unsympathetic view of the popular preference for fun, fashionable dresses, a little music, and even an exhibition of eating and drinking by people with an expensive air, attended by an impossible-comic waiter, I was more than willing to shew that the drama can humanize these things as easily as they, in the wrong hands, can dehumanize the drama.'

As we have seen, this attempt to toe the line of commercial requirements failed at the time, and *You Never Can Tell* remains Shaw's least characteristic play.

### (8) THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE (1896)

A melodrama.

The position of hero occupied by a devil's disciple is in the grand tradition of Prometheus, Lucifer, and Siegfried, all of whom were devil's disciples. 'Some enemy of the gods, unterrified champion of those oppressed by them, has always towered among the heroes of the loftiest poetry.' The path marked out by such Diabolonians as Milton, Blake, and Nietzsche led straight to Shaw, who remarks: 'There never was a play more certain to be written than *The Devil's Disciple* at the end of the nineteenth century. The age was visibly pregnant with it.'

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### (9) CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA (1897)

A play deliberately inviting comparison with Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra. Shaw offers his Caesar 'as an improvement upon Shakespeare's Caesar,' on the ground that while Shakespeare excelled in depicting great men as noble failures, his pessimism precluded him from depicting them as successes.

### (10) CAPTAIN BRASSBOUND'S CONVERSION (1898)

A play whose moral is too implicit and subtle to cross the footlights easily. Ellen Terry, for whom it was written, did not think it would act well.

It is Shaw's reaction to the darker side of Imperialism, with its force and punitive justice, its filibustering, 'its Bismarck worship, Stanley worship, Dr Jim worship, and now at last Kitchener worship with dead enemies dug up and mutilated.' Shaw dramatizes these forces in the persons of a judge and a soldier, both of whom are forcing civilization upon fanatical Africans at the point of punishment and pistol, so that fear and force dominate the situation.

Shaw's answer is that any situation can be dominated by sheer force of moral superiority. In the play, therefore, he makes Lady Cecily dominate and manage the situation, without recourse to either force or guile, as 'Tolstoy would have our Chamberlains and Balfours and German Emperors and Kitcheners and Lord Chief Justices and other slaves of false ideas and imaginary fears manage Europe.'

The three last-named plays were published by Bernard Shaw under the title Three Plays for Puritans. It is an apt title. Dick Dudgeon's reason for saving the clergyman from the gallows is not that he has fallen passionately in love with

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the clergyman's wife. Cleopatra is neither a Circe nor a wanton, and Shaw's Caesar does not account, as Shakespeare's Antony accounted, the world well lost for love. Nor does Lady Cecily spend any of her time rousing the passions of any of the men in the Moroccan mountains, although she is the only woman there.

The point to be realized, however, is not that these three plays are especially for Puritans, but that *all* Shaw's plays are plays for Puritans. In thus specifically labelling an early volume, its author was simply stressing for the instruction of his pupils, the public, the deliberate absence from his plays of the sensuousness which was at once the fetish and the stock-in-trade of plays churned out for the commercial theatre.

### (11) THE ADMIRABLE BASHVILLE (1900)

A dramatic version of Shaw's novel, Cashel Byron's Profession, in blank verse.

The international copyright laws of the time were such that, to prevent another person from dramatizing his work and collecting the resulting royalties, Shaw hastily had to dramatize the work himself. With only a week in which to do so, Shaw chose blank verse, because in that medium he found he could 'do in a week what it would have taken me a month to do in prose.'

### (12) MAN AND SUPERMAN (1901)

The then dramatic critic of The Times, Arthur Bingham Walkley, had asked Bernard Shaw why he did not write a play on Don Juan. Man and Superman was Shaw's answer. He took the legend of Don Juan in its Mozartian form and turned it into a parable of Creative Evolution.



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'But,' explains G. B. S., 'being then at the height of my invention and comedic talent, I decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly. I surrounded it with a comedy of which it formed only one act, and that act was so completely episodical (it was a dream which did not affect the action of the piece) that the comedy could be detached and played by itself; indeed it could hardly be played at full length owing to the enormous length of the entire work, though that feat has been performed a few times in Scotland by Mr Esmé Percy, who led one of the forlorn hopes of the advanced drama at that time. Also I supplied the published work with an imposing framework consisting of a preface, an appendix called The Revolutionist's Handbook, and a final display of aphoristic fireworks. - The effect was so vertiginous, apparently, that nobody noticed the new religion in the centre of the intellectual whirlpool.'

### (13) JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND (1904)

William Butler Yeats asked for this play to be written. He got more than he bargained for, and found that its production was beyond the slender resources of Dublin's then new Abbey Theatre.

✓ The establishment of Home Rule has altered neither the English nor the Irish characters, with the result that as a character study this play remains, and will always remain, as fresh and true as when written. Joe Devlin, prominent as an Irish M.P. of the pre-Home Rule days, once declared that John Bull's Other Island stated the Irish Problem finely, fully, and once for all.

### (14) HOW HE LIED TO HER HUSBAND (1904)

A *pièce d'occasion*, written during 'four days of unceasing rain in Scotland, at the instance of Arnold Daly, the American actor. Daly was playing The Man of Destiny, and needed a short play to go with it to provide a full evening's entertainment.

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The familiar theme of the Eternal Triangle is treated as we should expect, realistically and not romantically.

This was the first of Shaw's plays to be filmed. —

### (15) MAJOR BARBARA (1905)

A plea for the abolition of poverty as an 'infectious pestilence to be avoided at all costs.' The strength of the plea lies in Shaw's demonstration of the monstrous, false, yet inextricable positions into which individuals and institutions (such as the Salvation Army) are forced, and will continue to be forced, while poverty is tolerated.

### (16) THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA (1906)

A murder play, and the Shavian version of a 'thriller.' As such, the play is so interesting that its plot obscures its moral. This is, shortly, that the medical profession should be municipalized, and so deprived largely of its power to kill its patients (with no questions asked), and of all its incentive to encourage them in ill-health and disease in order to cure them for money.

### (17) GETTING MARRIED (1908)

A non-stop exposition of how the English marriage laws work, or fail to work, with such observations (implicit in the play and explicit in its preface) as that the success of marriage chiefly depends, not on love, but on the economic independence of the parties concerned; and that the mere desire for divorce should be considered sufficient grounds for granting it without question, if suitable provision were made for the children involved.

### (18) THE SHEWING-UP OF BLANCO POSNET (1909)

A religious tract in dramatic form. For many years this play was refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain because of 'its passages implicating God in the history of Blanco Posnet.'

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None of Shaw's plays is on the index now: the censorship remains, but it is exercised more intelligently, and people are less easily shocked.

(19) PRESS CUTTINGS (1909)

'A Topical Sketch.'

(20) THE GLIMPSE OF REALITY

'A Tragedietta.'

(21) PASSION, POISON, AND PETRIFICATION;  
OR, THE FATAL GAZOGENE

'A brief Tragedy for Barns and Booths.'

(22) THE FASCINATING FOUNDLING

'A Disgrace to the Author.'

Shaw lumps these playlets together under the title of Tomfooleries. Their real author seems to be Joey the Clown.

(23) THE DARK LADY OF THE SONNETS (1910)

A plea for a National Theatre, written at the suggestion of Dame Edith Lyttelton for a performance in aid of the National Theatre's funds. Shaw maintains that such an institution is worth having 'for the sake of the National Soul.'

(24) MISALLIANCE (1910)

A play founded on a consideration of eugenics. That we must set ourselves more eugenic rules than at present is certain, if the race is not to deteriorate, but if we make too many rules, obedience to some of them may cut



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across the purpose of the Life Force and defeat its object. While helping the Life Force we must take care to allow it wide latitude in which to indulge what may seem to us freakish whims, for it moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform.

### (25) FANNY'S FIRST PLAY (1911)

'A potboiler.' Notable in its day for the Prologue and Epilogue, in which appear the more famous dramatic critics of the time thinly disguised under appropriate names.

The play within the play is an exhortation to our suburban middle class to wake up and live. 'I hate to see dead people walking about: it is unnatural. And our respectable middle-class people are all as dead as mutton. Out of the mouth of Mrs Knox I have delivered on them the judgment of her God.'

### (26) ANDROCLES AND THE LION (1912)

'In this play I have represented one of the Roman persecutions of the early Christians, not as a conflict of a false theology with a true, but as what all such persecutions essentially are: an attempt to suppress a propaganda that seemed to threaten the interests involved in the established law and order, organized and maintained in the name of religion and justice by politicians who are pure opportunist Have-and-Holders.'

### (27) PYGMALION (1912)

This is the kind of play Shaw would write if he were asked to write one about Cinderella or The Ugly Duckling.

Not written as the result of any such request, the chance factors contributing to its creation are more in evidence than in the case of any of his other plays. For instance, to name but two, Shaw, to whom the English language is a treasury he will not see ill-used without protest, was himself interested in phonetics from the

## APPENDIX

eighteen-seventies onwards, and the portrait of Higgins owes some at least of its touches to the characteristics of Henry Sweet, an intractable phonetician in practice at the beginning of this century. The second factor is Mrs Patrick Campbell, who, without knowing it, set Shaw thinking about Eliza Doolittle fifteen years before he actually put her on paper.

In 1912 the play was notorious for introducing to the stage in a big way the swear-word 'bloody.' In 1938 it was notable, thanks chiefly to Gabriel Pascal, Leslie Howard, Anthony Asquith, and G. B. S. himself, for providing the first successful Shavian film.

(28)

### OVERRULED

(1912)

A playlet on farcical comedy lines, Overruled depicts the orgy of subterfuges and lies indulged in by married people who find themselves sexually attracted outside the marriage bond and who yet wish to preserve the conventions. To avoid such deceits, Shaw infers, we must learn to behave naturally and not artificially, and to fit our moral codes to our natures, instead of vice versa, on the ground 'that no necessary inevitable operation of human nature can reasonably be regarded as sinful at all, and that a morality which assumes the contrary is an absurd morality.'

(29)

### GREAT CATHERINE

(1913)

A bravura piece written for Gertrude Kingston, whom Shaw had recommended to play queens. It was then discovered that in the modern drama there were no queens, while in the older drama there were none worth playing. So, to make his advice acceptable, Shaw wrote Great Catherine, remarking that no other queen was capable of standing up to the joint talents of Gertrude Kingston and Bernard Shaw.

Since the author was simply providing a vehicle for the artist, the spectator learns nothing from the play about Russia that he or she did not know before.

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(1914-18)

(30) THE MUSIC CURE

‘A Piece of Utter Nonsense.’

(31) O’FLAHERTY, V.C.

‘A Recruiting Pamphlet.’

(32) THE INCA OF PERUSALEM

‘An almost Historical Comedietta.’

(33) AUGUSTUS DOES HIS BIT

‘A True-to-Life Farce.’

(34) ANNAJANSKA, THE BOLSHEVIK EMPRESS

‘A Revolutionary Pamphlet.’

Such were the plays written by Bernard Shaw during the War. Their triviality need not surprise us, for their author realized early that telling the truth in time of war was not compatible with the Defence of the Realm Act. Besides, the public did not want to be made to think, but to forget, with the famous result that *Chu Chin Chow* ran in London without a break for more than four years.

It is noteworthy that the idea used by Shaw in *O’Flaherty, V.C.*—enlisting Irish recruits by telling them that the enemy was England—was by no means as far-fetched as it sounds. For when the father of Michael O’Leary, V.C., was asked to make a speech to the villagers, he rose to the occasion by saying, so the story goes, that he was mighty glad to think that his son was in the War knocking hell out of those English.



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35) HEARTBREAK HOUSE (1919)

Begun in 1914 before the War began, this fantasia is a dramatization in the Russian manner of 'cultured, leisured Europe' before the War.'

(36) IN THE BEGINNING (1919-21)

(37) THE GOSPEL OF THE BROTHERS  
BARNABAS

(38) THE THING HAPPENS

(39) THE TRAGEDY OF AN ELDERLY  
GENTLEMAN

(40) AS FAR AS THOUGHT CAN REACH

These five plays comprise the pentalogy known as *Back to Methuselah*, a work which, in design and scope, occupies in the drama the same position that Wagner's tetralogy, *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, occupies in music.

*Back to Methuselah* is Shaw's second parable of Creative Evolution, his first being *Man and Superman*. Here the Garden of Eden legend is substituted for the legend of Don Juan.

The thesis of the work is the necessity for the improvement of Man and the possibility of effecting this improvement through longevity. Not only is longevity desirable, the argument goes, but it is absolutely necessary, if Man is to be saved, because at present men wear out and die just when they are tiring of their petty follies and ambitions, just when they have gained enough experience of life to be able and willing to do something really worth while.

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Bernard Shaw is under few illusions as to the crudity of what he describes as his 'beginning of a Bible for Creative Evolution.' He hopes that 'a hundred apter and more elegant parables by younger hands will soon leave mine as far behind as the religious pictures of the fifteenth century left behind the first attempts of the early Christian at iconography.'

(41)

### SAINT JOAN

(1923)

A study of the Warrior Saint as a Protestant martyr, an apostle of Nationalism, and a realist in warfare.

A model for all historical plays. For purposes of the stage it is not enough merely to write history, however correctly and winsomely: one must also interpret history. One must do so in such a way, moreover, that its meaning, in terms of modern thought, is immediately clear to the average intelligence of a theatre audience. It is the business of the stage, Shaw rightly says, 'to make its figures more intelligible to themselves than they would be in real life; for by no other means can they be made intelligible to the audience.'

In this play Cauchon, Lemaitre, and Warwick between them have to make clear to the audience, not only the Church, the Inquisition, and Feudalism, about which they knew something, but also Protestantism and Nationalism, about which they knew nothing. They can do this only by making these things clear to themselves and to each other. Shaw says accordingly: 'The things I represent these three exponents of the drama as saying are the things they actually would have said if they had known what they were doing.'

As a result, history is interpreted, the subject is illumined, and the play is alive. The whole art of historical drama is to make its characters speak more wisely than they knew, without seeming to lift them out of their epoch, and without giving any impression of mental anachronism. Saint Joan shows that Bernard Shaw is a master of this art.

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(42) THE APPLE CART (1930)

A political extravaganza, in which a battle of wits is staged between a King and his Prime Minister. 'The comedic paradox of the situation is that the King wins, not by exercising his royal authority, but by threatening to resign it and go to the democratic poll.'

Boanerges, by the way, though not a portrait from life, would not have been quite the same character if John Burns had never lived.

(43) TOO TRUE TO BE GOOD (1931)

'A Collection of Stage Sermons by a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.'

The moral of this play is, 'that our capitalistic system, with its golden exceptions of idle richery and its leaden rule of anxious poverty, is as desperate a failure from the point of view of the rich as of the poor.'

(44) VILLAGE WOOING (1932)

'A Comedietta for Two Voices.'

(45) ON THE ROCKS (1933)

A critical commentary on most of the institutions and codes of western civilization, focused round a British Prime Minister so burdened with work and so bound with red tape and routine that he has neither the energy left to govern nor the leisure to think how to govern.

Shortly before writing this play Shaw had visited Russia, where he was impressed by the ability of Dictators to get things done, by cutting through red tape and tradition.

In view of this visit, the preface to the play is largely devoted, appropriately enough, to the subject of human extermination, or 'liquidation,' as it is now called.



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### (46) THE SIMPLETON OF THE (1934) UNEXPECTED ISLES

‘A Vision of Judgment.’

This dramatic fable is highly characteristic of its author, for on the Day of Judgment, according to Shaw, no one is punished. Those who are not pulling their weight in the social boat are simply liquidated. Immediately and painlessly they vanish into thin air, and are no more.

Shaw takes full advantage of the comic possibilities of such a momentous situation, but threading through its uproarious surprises is Shaw’s third attempt to dramatize Creative Evolution. Giving the impression here of a superfluous but irrepressible sub-plot, this attempt inevitably suffers by comparison with the two previous ones, lacking the vigour of the one in *Man and Superman*, and the depth of the one in *Back to Methuselah*.

### (47) THE SIX OF CALAIS (1934)

‘A Medieval War Story by Jean Froissart, Auguste Rodin, and Bernard Shaw.’

Written to provide material for actors, this little play is one of the few which Shaw wrote simply as a dramatist, and not as a preacher too.

‘The Six of Calais is an acting piece and nothing else.’

### (48) THE MILLIONAIRESS (1936)

A query, and for all practical purposes an unanswered one, as to what is to be done with people who rise to eminence by sheer force of personality. In other words, this comedy is the result of the surprising staying power which the various Dictators have shown. Without the emergence and successful consolidation effected by Mussolini, Stalin, Ataturk, Salazar, and Hitler, it probably would not have been written.

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(49) GENEVA (1938)

The only notable thing effected by the over-titled Intellectual Co-operation Committee of the League of Nations, which apparently lay in a moribund condition from birth, was to tickle Bernard Shaw's sense of humour and set him to work on a play in spite of his fourscore years.

This topical commentary on 1938, Shaw, by rewriting parts of it, was able to keep topical for 1939, and so to balance it, as it were, on the knife edge of Europe's international situation for more than two hundred performances in London.

No grass grows beneath Shaw's nimble feet. On the outbreak of war in September 1939 the play was brought up to date in such a way that it would remain topical 'for the duration.'

In a minor way the play is remarkable for having passed the Censor, in spite of the personalities it deals with, and in a major way for the fairness, good temper, and scope of its last act, where Bombardone, Battler, and Flanco are arraigned before the High Court of the Hague.

About an hour and a half long, this act will continue to hold audiences long after its topicalities and humours have lost their point. It will hold them by the majesty and music of its prose. To hear it is like listening to grand opera.

(50) IN GOOD KING CHARLES'S (1939)  
GOLDEN DAYS

'A History Lesson by a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.'

All his life Bernard Shaw has written his plays in whatever dramatic forms pleased him. In this play the first act lasts about an hour and a half. Then, after the one and only interval, comes the second and last act with a duration of how long? Twenty minutes!

Where other dramatists find only Romance in Nell Gwyn, Shaw finds Religion and Science and Art in Fox and Newton and Kneller.

The fiftieth play of the modern world's greatest dramatist and wit, completed in his eighty-fourth year.

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